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# PENDELLION

TALLY HO

PATCH

THE MIDNIGHT STEEPLECHASE

MY LORD GOES WAYFARING

THREE WHITE STOCKINGS

ONE MAN IN HIS TIME

ECHOING HORN

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*Donkey in front of the castle*



# PENDELLION

*by*

MOYRA CHARLTON

*Illustrated by*

LIONEL EDWARDS



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FOR  
SHEILA  
*at the parting of the ways*



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# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
1. MORNING	I
2. LONDON RIVER	6
3. EVENING AT MORTIMER HOUSE	19
4. IN THE GALLERY	38
5. PENDELLION	43
6. TREVENNOR TREHERNE	55
7. THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS	72
8. HUNTING ON THE HILL	82
9. VENETIA RIDES ALONE	98
10. THE FORMING OF THE FELLOWSHIP	107
11. IN PLYMOUTH TOWN	116
12. THEY SAILED WITH THE WIND	127
13. THE SILVER FLAGON	143
14. THE BEACON	157
15. PENANCE	171
16. THE WITCHES' SABBATH	180
17. THE MOONSTONE	191
18. THE HART ROYAL	199
19. THE PASSING OF THE TORCH	214
20. JOYOUS GARD	227

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Class No. \_\_\_\_\_

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# ILLUSTRATIONS

PENDELLION! . . . A GREAT GREY HOUSE, MASSIVE, STATELY, PROUDLY DARING THE FOUR WINDS OF HEAVEN	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
HOLDING HERSELF VERY STRAIGHT, SHE SWEPT DOWNSTAIRS TO THE HALL	21
'I AM SIR NICHOLAS MORTIMER. YOUR BUSINESS?'	37
'YOU MUST BE MISTRESS MORTIMER. ARE YOU LOOKING FOR SOMETHING?'	63
SHE KEPT HER HORSE'S HEAD STRAIGHT	69
'IT IS EMPTY,' HE SAID. 'I WALKED ALL ROUND IT AND FOUND NO ONE	75
'GOOD LUCK TO THEM ALL, AND GOOD FORTUNE!'	141
'HAVE YOU SEEN ANY GIPSIES?' VENN ASKED IMPATIENTLY	154
MERRYNN SAT VERY STILL, HER CHIN IN HER HAND	197
THERE HE STOOD, WITH THE ATLANTIC SHINING AROUND HIM, A HART ROYAL IF EVER THERE WAS ONE	209

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## *Chapter I*

### MORNING

come in,' said Nicholas Mortimer.

He was standing at the far end of the room, at the open window that looked across the garden to the river. The black and white tiled floor led up to him, where he stood, still as a statue, remote, lonely.

'Good morning, father,' said Venetia.

He turned towards her. Even in the shadow, with the light behind him, she could see that he looked strange, his face grey, with something cold and hard in his eyes. She suddenly wanted to turn and run out again; she stopped and looked at him. Then his expression altered, the line of the mouth above the small dark beard softened, his eyes came to life.

'Good morning, Venetia, and a happy birthday.'

She was no longer afraid but went up and kissed him. Outside there was sunlight and the water shone through the trees. It was April, and she was eleven to-day.

'Did you sleep well?' went on the deep measured voice.

'Very well indeed, father.'

'And what has the morning brought you in the way of gifts?'

'Well, a fine lace collar and cuffs from Nurse, to match my black velvet dress, and a marvellous pretty ink-stand from Mrs. Fane, all made in alabaster with a dragon round it that swallows its own tail.'

'That I can well imagine as Mrs. Fane's choice! What else?'

'Sweetmeats made of sugar from Patience.'



‘Patience? Oh yes, the chambermaid. And your brother Peregrine?’

‘Best of all, he has given me his own true gentle falcon, “Magic”.’

‘That was a generous gesture.’

Sir Nicholas Mortimer surveyed his daughter critically. She was dressed very fine for her birthday, in a brown dress trimmed with gold, and Patience had combed her hair until it shone. Venetia had copper-coloured hair, a mass of it, and in the sun it shone red. ‘Red-haired women are the very devil!’ a young courtier had once said to her father. He had given his short sharp laugh that had little of amusement in it, and had murmured ‘*Lèse-majesté*’. He said that because the Queen had red hair too.

‘You look a proud London lady,’ he remarked, ‘which is no mean feat at eleven years! Now, child, for my present to you——’

He went over to a table by the fire and handed her two volumes, richly bound in leather with silver clasps. On the title page of the first was printed:

The Noble and Joyous Book entitled  
LE MORTE D'ARTHUR . . .  
By Sir Thomas Malory Knight

On the opposite page was an inscription in her father's graceful hand:

To Venetia Mortimer on her birthday, the twentieth day of April in this year of grace 1583, from Nicholas Mortimer. At Mortimer House, London.

Venetia held the volumes in her hands. She was a great reader and of all the books she had read *Le Morte d'Arthur* was nearest to her heart. Here in all its splendour was the history of King Arthur and the fellowship of the

Round Table in that other more stirring England—Sir Launcelot, Sir Tristram and the sword Excalibur; Sir Gareth, Sir Gawaine and Sir Galahad who found the Holy Graal. Here, between her fingers, were the romances, tournaments and adventures that happened at Carlion, Camelot and Tintagel and in the forest ways that lay between. Names like trumpet calls the castles had—Pendragon and Astolat, Castle Perilous, Joyous Gard——

‘Well?’ said Nicholas Mortimer.

‘Father, how could you have known?—Is it my own, to keep?’

‘Of course—the foundation of your library. I am glad you like it.’

She looked up into those grey watchful eyes that told so little what went on behind them. In all these eleven years she had grown to know him hardly at all, this tall magnificent man who was her father.

There was a pause. Nicholas Mortimer turned back to the window and looked into the garden. Venetia wanted to go away by herself to some quiet corner and start reading.

‘Perry is at his lessons with Master Ferrars now. I suppose I should go and join him. Do you leave soon for the Court, father?’

‘I am not going to Court to-day, Venetia.’

‘Not at all?’

‘No. Nor you to lessons. It is your birthday, we will cry holiday. This evening we entertain guests; Peregrine will wait on me and I wish you to play hostess at my table, but to-day we are going out for the day on the river.’

‘The whole day? Taking dinner with us? You too, father?’

‘Is it then so rare that I go out with you?’

Venetia flushed at the tone of his question, the hint of

arrogance. But it *was* rare. He was always at the Court, or dining in great houses, or hunting, or else away on royal progresses in the country. Sometimes they went out with him. They had seen the Queen hunting in Waltham Forest; and watched her travelling down the Thames from Westminster to Greenwich with the Lord Mayor and the city companies in barges escorting her, and musicians playing all the way and the church bells of the city of London ringing a tumultuous welcome over all. They had sat in their own boat at the side and seen their father in one of the state barges following, among the lords of the Privy Chamber and the Council. . . . Yes, they had gone out with him often, but usually at a distance and never alone.

‘Is it rare that I go out with you, Venetia?’

‘Yes, sir.’

He stood very still, staring down at her.

‘You meet few children of your own age. Do you miss company?’

‘No, father. We don’t care much for strange children.’

‘Can you remember your mother, Venetia?’

That startled her. He never spoke of their mother. Venetia had a rather morbid curiosity about her. It made one somehow different from others to have no mother, to be able to say a little grandly, ‘She died, you see, when my brother was born’.

‘No, father. I thought I did once, but it’s gone. Perhaps it was just a dream about her portrait.’

Instead of a mother there had always been Mrs. Fane. The household *was* Mrs. Fane; she managed it, she brought up Venetia and Peregrine, she engaged the servants, rated them, dismissed them. She had grey hair, red hands and a loud voice and put the fear of God into every one—except their father. She was some distant

cousin of his and Venetia had heard people say that she would like to become a closer relation—the second Lady Mortimer—but *that* Venetia was sure she would never be. Mrs. Fane showed to herself and Perry a fierce tenderness that left them very little peace, but Sir Nicholas she respected and feared.

Nicholas Mortimer had also been deep in his own thoughts. Now he was speaking again:

‘The watermen are ordered for ten o’clock. Leaving from the garden stairs. You, your brother and I will travel in the first barge, Mrs. Fane, Master Ferrars and the rest of them in the second. Mrs. Fane knows already but you can tell Peregrine. Now, away with you!’

Venetia went, very pleasantly excited. She called in at the schoolroom and found her brother poring over his Latin with Master Ferrars.

‘Holiday, Perry!’ she announced. ‘Father is coming with us down the river. We leave at ten. You too, Master Ferrars!’

Perry’s brown head lifted abruptly from his *Grammar*. He had grey eyes like his father.

‘No lessons! Cheers for all holidays! Quick, sir, we must pack up.’

Venetia went down into the garden, still nursing her two volumes of *Morte d’Arthur*. Gardeners were at work on the paths; a waterman in her father’s cream and gold livery waited by the landing stage. The daffodils were just shaking off the dew and the sun flickered on the water between the elm trees. It was April and she was eleven. Another year of life was opening out before her with a promise as golden as the morning. She breathed deep. Above the warm spring scents of the garden she caught the haunting smell of the river.



## Chapter 2

### LONDON RIVER

A FEW minutes after ten o'clock they were away. They embarked from the steps at the bottom of the garden (most of the Strand mansions had their own landing stage) and, as Nicholas Mortimer had promised, he went alone with the children and the crew of watermen in the first barge, while Mrs. Fane, Master Ferrars, the Gentleman Usher and the butler (who always had to come too when meals were served out-of-doors), not to mention various pages and servants, followed behind in the larger, heavier boat. They were out of ear-shot and Venetia noticed with satisfaction that they fell further and further astern as the watermen bent to their oars and skimmed downstream with the tide.

Venetia sat beside her father on a pile of crimson cushions in the waist of the barge. To start with, Perry charged up and down from bows to stern, determined to miss nothing and managing to get in the way of the rowers and obstruct every one's view. Perry was only nine and could be very childish at times.

'Oh look!' he shouted from the bows, 'there are two watermen fighting on the quay. I wonder why? Look at that barge, it's going round in a circle. Why, William?'

William, the largest and beefiest of the oarsmen, said: 'Reckon one side's a-pulling harder than t'other, Master Peregrine.'

Perry bore down on them all again.

'Perry, *do* stop bobbing about!' said Venetia in an elder-sisterly voice, 'and please get off my foot.'

'Sorry, I took it for a plank. Look, oh look! one of those two has fallen in. *Splash!*'

They both laughed. It was the sort of joke that appealed to them very much.

'There is London Bridge!' shouted Perry next, 'and the Tower beyond. Do you remember the time we went to see the lions there? How would you like to be a doomed man going to prison? Do they all go through the Traitor's Gate, father? Would I?'

'You're not important enough to go to the Tower,' said Venetia scornfully 'You'd go to the Fleet or some prison south of the river.'

'I wouldn't, they would never catch me. I would take ship and sail to the China Seas, or even to France——'

'Sit down, Peregrine,' said his father. Perry sat down and was silent for a short space.

Venetia lay back on the cushions and looked at the sky. It was a huge sky, cloudless and shining. The sun beat down gently on her eyelids. If Mrs. Fane were here she would say, 'Put on your mask, Venetia', but she was in the other boat out of ear-shot and so Venetia allowed the sun to flood down on her and didn't care in the least if she grew freckles. The bright light made red and yellow rings circle before her eyes in a giddy dance; she heard the creak of the oars and the watery plop against the planking of the barge, and if she opened her eyes a little, rainbows flickered in her lashes and the whole river scene shivered like a reflection. She was, she knew, very happy.

When she really did look up she found her father watching her. His scrutiny was so penetrating that Venetia felt he was seeing some one different lying back among the cushions in the sun.

'I wish we went everywhere by water,' she said, more

because she felt she must say something than because she really meant it.

‘As they do in Venice,’ said her father, ‘where I met and married your mother. That is why we called you Venetia.’

‘What did she look like—my mother?’ asked Venetia, greatly daring.

‘Like you. Or as you will be when you are older. She had hair like yours.’

They came under the shadow of London Bridge. The tall houses loomed above them and it was amusing to be sailing underneath a street. The helmsman shouted an order, the rowers shipped their oars, and the barge shot through on a great swirl of current. It was dank and cold between the arches.

‘Ooee-ee!’ holloed Perry, and the echo travelled all around them—‘Ooee-ee’. Then they were out again, blinded by the sun, and the warmth hit them like a wind.

They passed the Tower, which William the Conqueror had raised to keep watch over London, and without knowing why Venetia felt a little cold shiver down her back, the same coldness that they had all felt under London Bridge.

And, suddenly, they were among the ships. Ships were on all sides—small pinnaces, galleons, fast sailing craft with heavy cannon—towering above them in their brilliant patterns of colour, swinging around their moorings with ropes straining. Ships with sails furled, ships with pendants and banners of silk fringed with gold, all spread on the shrouds to dry in the sun. And with them men—men scrubbing decks, greasing guns, manhandling bales; men painting, splicing, hammering; men cursing, singing and laughing, men stripped to the waist with



rings in their ears. And everywhere a smell of seaweed, tar, and new paint.

As they passed under the great square sterns with their jutting galleries, the children could read the names. They were lovely names—*Lion* of London, *Elizabeth Bonaventure*, *Galleon Seymour*, *Wild Cat*, *Desire* of Dartmouth. A massive half-naked mariner with a purple handkerchief knotted round his head and a face full of creases which seemed to come from a permanent grin, was leaning over the rail in the *Elizabeth Bonaventure*, doing nothing in particular. He had a stubble on his chin and his hairy chest glistened. He waved at the children and shouted cheerfully:

‘Come up and have a look about.’

‘Oh *couldn't* we?’ begged Perry.

‘Not to-day,’ said Nicholas. ‘Sometime you shall.’

Their friend disappeared, but a moment later came back, running along the deck to keep level with the barge.

‘Here, little maid, catch!’ he called to Venetia, and flung her something shining. ‘Birthdays come but once a year.’

The bright object fell between the cushions and Venetia, after an excited scramble, retrieved a flat silver coin. She looked back to wave her thanks. Her massive man was straddling the deck, his face all one grin. He turned and spat cleverly over the side as she waved, which was rude, but he was a kind man.

‘How did he know it was my birthday?’ wondered Venetia.

‘Just guessed, I expect,’ said Perry. ‘Let’s see.’

‘A Mexican *real*,’ said her father. ‘Those are the arms of Leon and Castile. The *Elizabeth* was trading along the Brazil seaboard last year and picked up a well-loaded pinnace taking a short cut to the treasure fleet.’

‘What do they trade in, father?’

'All manner of things. We give them hollands, Manchester-cottons, black and cramasie velvets, spices, locks for doors, scissors, nails, soap. In return we load sweet wines, oil, skins, silks—all depending on where we are trading.'

'And where do we go trading?'

'There's a question! Along the coasts of Barbary to Arabia and Aleppo, to Guinea and round Buona Esperance, which they call the Cape of Good Hope. To Ethiopia and the Persian Gulf; to Goa and India and the Indies, and beyond to the China Seas. Westward to Panama, Brazil and the Main, and through Magellan Straits along all the coast of New Spain. You have heard tell of the passage that lies to the north-west, the Strait of Anian? Frobisher and Gilbert are set on discovering it, for thereby could we come into the China Seas from the west to trade with Cathay.'

Venetia listened to the rich cadences of her father's voice as he reeled off names that were as lovely as legends. She had never known a voice like his. All the depth and passion that he never showed came out when he spoke. Master Ferrars had once said it was the voice of an orator that could sway thousands.

'I would like to fit my own ship and sail in her,' said Perry, his brown, curly hair blowing, his eyes bright.

For the first time that day Nicholas Mortimer really seemed to notice his son.

'So you shall, Peregrine, and engage in piracy too, as long as it is against the Queen's enemies. Prize money is vital to those who make voyages. To-night at supper you will hear talk of the new expedition about to sail from the west under Sir Humphrey Gilbert. Mr. Raleigh has fitted up a ship and we are all shareholders as well as well-wishers.'

'Where is he going?' asked Perry.

'To Florida, to make a plantation under the Queen's warrant.'

Venetia had dropped out of the conversation. Nicholas Mortimer and his son were speaking as man to man, and almost instinctively Venetia knew that it was talk in which she could have no part, because she was a girl and would one day be a woman. It came to her suddenly. She shared Perry's schoolmasters, she was quicker and more intelligent than her brother, she rode as well and played the lute better, but never, never would she talk with her father as Perry was doing now. The bitterness of realizing that thus far she could share and no further, that comes to all women at some time or another through the ages, came to Venetia Mortimer on her eleventh birthday.

Savouring the bitterness of her discovery, Venetia fingered her silver *real*. That at least had been given to *her*, a piece of treasure from the Main. It was a flat, rough-hewn piece, stamped on one side with a device of castles and lions—the arms of Leon and Castile—and on the reverse showing two pillars with crowns on them and the motto PLUS ULTRA. She tucked it carefully in her inner pocket, thinking of the great glistening man with the stubbly chin and the grin. She wondered why he had thrown it to her, an ordinary little girl in a brown-and-gold dress, with reddish hair, sitting in a boat.

They were clear of London Pool now and the ships were moored more sparsely. The river had widened out, the city was behind them and Greenwich palace not so far ahead. Little bays and inlets broke the marshy banks and there was a vivid spring green over everything.

'Pull in to the left bank,' said her father to the man at the tiller, 'and when you come to a stream, turn into it and make fast.'

Far behind was a long, dark dot that must be the second boat.

‘They will never see us turn in!’ exclaimed Venetia.

‘Do you mind?’ said her father, with a faint half-smile.

Mrs. Fane, with her dear fussy, scolding bustle; Master Ferrars, thin and ambling in his rusty gown; Mr. Sparks, her father’s chief Gentleman Usher, tall, elegant, slightly scented, with one crystal ear-ring in his left ear; Mann the pompous butler; and the pages and lackeys—how could she mind if they rowed on down the broad silver Thames and left the three of them together? Looking at her father she felt that he, too, cared little. But Perry was practical.

‘What about dinner?’ he said. ‘I am hungry.’

Nicholas laughed, short, sharp and sudden.

‘Oh wise Peregrine! But I too am wise. Here we have a basket containing a boiled chicken, a ham, three pigeon pies, a cake with almond sugar on it, and a small barrel of beer—not to mention a royal share for the watermen.’

So he had planned to lose the second boat all along! It was strange, thought Venetia, that this dark splendid man who was their father was so little known to them. He had never seemed particularly interested in them till to-day.

They turned up the creek and brushed along the bank through the rushes till they came to a dry hillock and the broken remnant of a jetty, black-rotten with water and age. Here they made fast. Nicholas Mortimer clambered ashore and William, the waterman, helped Venetia and Perry after him, following himself with the basket of food and the little beer barrel.

They found themselves in a great expanse of marsh country. There was an enormous sky around them and the distances were misty, as so often down on the Thames estuary. There were larks towering everywhere and a



number of wheeling gulls, and the saltiness in the air meant that the sea was very close at hand.

'Here's a dry mound,' said their father to William, who laid down his burden. Another man came up with a sheepskin rug, then he and William went back to the boat.

'Will they eat now?' asked Perry.

'Yes,' said his father, 'and drink, and sleep. Now, Venetia, do your duty by the dinner.'

'We might make a fire,' said Venetia, concentrating on unpacking the chicken.

'Why, I am not cold!' this from Perry. 'Can I take off my doublet, father?'

'If you want to.'

'And my ruff?'

'Perry!' said Venetia scandalized.

'If you want to,' said her father again. Perry made a face at his sister and joyfully unhitched his sticky ruff.

'I meant a fire to cook by,' said Venetia. 'But we don't really need one.' She handed out the pigeon pies and chicken, and they all munched.

'There's a heron!' said her father.

There he was, sure enough, a wise old bird, balancing in the shallows.

'He knows we have no hawks with us.' Venetia was rather glad that, for once, the old varmint could go undisturbed.

Perry announced: 'David says that a fast peregrine can hunt a hawk as well as a saker.'

Nicholas was an authority on falconry. He said:

'David is wrong. He cannot.'

'Why did you call Perry Peregrine, father? Was it because he looked like a hawk?'

'A predatory air, you mean? Not quite. He was born on a journey—Peregrine means a traveller.'

'Can I have some cake, Venetia? Where was I born, father?'

His father answered slowly and very quietly, almost to himself:

'You were born in the mountains, on a night of storm. Your mother and I were married in Venice; her father was an English envoy there and I was nineteen years old and touring Europe. She was seventeen years and three months when Venetia was born, and we made Venice our home for another year after that, but in between times we travelled. Christina loved to travel. We went the length and breadth of the country, to Florence and Perugia, across to Naples and into the kingdom of Savoy. We went to Rome, the papist capital. But always we found our way back to Venice.'

'My name-city,' murmured Venetia.

'Yes, Venice—a beautiful, gay, glittering, pagan city. We rented a palace on the Grand Canal and woke to see the sunrise on the water, and at nights the gondolas passed under our windows in the starlight, and there was music, music all the time. The new learning had possessed that town like a fire; Robusti, called Tintoretto, was painting in the Ducal Palace, and the master Titian, an old man close on ninety, was still filling his great canvases with marvellous colour. When he died, they say, four years after, all Venice went into mourning. I had Veronese to paint your mother's portrait the second year of our marriage, the one that now hangs above the stairs. But Christina best loved Florence, with its serenity, and the spirit of Messer Leonardo that still brooded over the place——'

'Leonardo da Vinci?' said Venetia.

'The same. He was a man who believed many strange things. But his greatest belief was in a machine to make men fly.'

'Could he make them?' asked Perry, wide-eyed.

'Never quite, but he never gave up trying. Then your mother and I decided to go into France. The snow lay long on the passes that year and our journey was delayed. It was mad of me to start, but Christina seemed in fine health and had a great will to go. The roads were rough and we met with bad weather. She died at a miserable inn in the High Alps, at two o'clock in the morning, when the storm was at its height and the ebb of life is lowest. You were the child of that terrible journey. I called you Peregrine, a wayfarer. I brought you and Venetia home to England, to the house in the Strand. Did you never hear all this?'

'Not all of it,' whispered Venetia.

But she had heard other things, dark backstairs' whispers. She had heard that when Nicholas Mortimer, a widower at twenty-two, had brought his children to London he was a broken, dangerous man, who believed that he could have prevented his wife's death; who shut himself up alone and blasphemed against his God and hated all men, his children more than any. Those were tales. Venetia had never seen her father lose his grave self-control, nor even raise his voice, and she did not believe them. But it was at that time Mrs. Fane had come to them, and her benevolent tyranny from then on had ruled the house.

After dinner Nicholas Mortimer lay on the sheepskin in the sun, Venetia wandered around looking for violets and primroses, and Perry built a dam. He found a little trickle of water and decided to pile up earth and stones



until he had a barrier mighty enough to hold the torrent in check.

He set to work with sturdy concentration. It was not easy to find his material among the rushes and reeds, but he discovered another fragment of wooden jetty, then a hillock with some stones, and moss and wet earth plastered the whole. He knelt on the wet ground working. 'Mrs. Fane will have a seizure when she sees the state of his shirt and hose,' Venetia reflected. But father seemed to care little about what Perry did to his clothes, so it must be all right.

Venetia herself, for all her air of disapproval, reached over for a nest of violets and put her right foot into a bog hole up to the ankle. The water was icy cold and slopped about inside her slipper, so she took it off and sat down on a tuft of coarse grass close to Perry, and held up her foot to dry. Another thing Mrs. Fane would scold at—sitting on damp grass!

The warmth of the sun, and dinner, and the beer, made her drowsy. She fell to thinking of Master Leonardo da Vinci's flying machines. How strange it would be if he had succeeded! She imagined men in the air, coming in from the sea over this flat marsh land, flying like birds, silently. How odd London would look from up there, and the river like the bright thread of a tapestry.

'I cannot understand it!' said Perry, disappointment all over his face. 'It's a good dam and no water is leaking through but there is no pool above. What happens to it?'

'It is the fault of the marshes,' said his father's deep voice. He was standing there watching them. 'The water soaks away into the wet ground. I fear you have sited your dam wrong, my son, and your labour is wasted. It is a fine dam too.'

He sat down on the grass beside Venetia, remarked

'Damp', and made her get up while he spread out his cloak. Then they both sat down again and continued to gaze ruefully at Perry's dam.

'Father,' said Venetia, 'Master Leonardo's flying machines—— Could it ever happen?'

'In this age of science and discovery anything could happen. When new lands are found every year and men can conjure gold from a stone, it would be a fool who refused to believe.'

There was a silence. A ship was coming in up the river, her sails full, pretty as a bird. Perry gazed at her, entirely absorbed, his dam forgotten.

'Old Leonardo used to lie in the hills outside Assise,' said Nicholas, 'and study the birds flying. As we might study those gulls over that pool. . . . On this marsh in winter you find geese in their thousands, pink-feet from the far north. They have gone back to their breeding-grounds by now. And there are snipe around here.— Did you hear that?'

'That chucking noise?'

'Yes. A water-hen disturbed in the reeds.'

A little keen tooth of wind was coming in from seaward and the sun was moving west. Nicholas got up and held out his hands to Venetia.

'Time we went homeward. Your friend Mr. Sidney—I beg his pardon, Sir Philip—comes to sup with us, with young Mr. Cavendish, and Mr. Raleigh may call in. Put on your shoe—what a wet one! You had best take it off again in the barge and wear the rug.'

They were walking back to the boat carrying the sheepskin, and William following after with the baskets, when their father stopped in his tracks.

'Listen!'

The afternoon sky was filled with a great, lonely cry.

Over the river he came, neck outstretched, great wings spread, one solitary wild goose flying north.

'I was wrong,' said Nicholas. 'They have not all gone. One at least was to follow.'

'Where is he going?'

'To Scotland first, then north, Venetia, to Newfoundland, perhaps, and the ice and snow of Conception Bay, or even to the mysterious North-West Passage.'

They turned to watch the flight of the goose, a receding speck against the misty gold, until the haunting cry died across the mud flats. Venetia heard her father say, very low:

'Of all living things the wild goose is most free.'

The tide had turned and helped them on their journey back. The ships in the Pool were quieter, more shadowy and there was no sign of Venetia's massive mariner on the decks of the *Elizabeth Bonaventure*. They passed some swans moving slowly against the stream, so princely that one looked again to see if they wore coronets. Even Perry spoke little. He sat up in the bows, watching the water drip gold from the oar blades, and turning at times to see the city take form out of the mist, the Tower, London Bridge, St. Paul's.

Venetia sat among the crimson cushions beside her father. Only once did she break the friendly silence between them, to say shyly:

'It has been the most beautiful birthday in the world, father. I shall always remember it.'

To her surprise, he took both her hands in his and answered slowly:

'I too, Venetia, shall remember. Whatever comes between us in the future, we share this day, you and Perry and I.'

Five minutes later they were alongside the stairs of Mortimer House.

### Chapter 3

#### EVENING AT MORTIMER HOUSE

VENETIA dressed with care for the evening. She decided to wear her newest dress, a sea-water-green satin that showed up well by candlelight. It was sewn with patterns of tiny seed-pearls, and seed-pearls were worn in the hair. While Patience dressed her head, Venetia read her *Morte d'Arthur*.

Mrs. Fane had been a trifle stiff since they had arrived back; she had taken umbrage. Venetia, feigning great innocence, had heard how they in the second boat had missed the leading one. After some deliberation, they had consumed their dinner on a small island, suffering discomfort from clouds of water flies, and had then proceeded to Greenwich, where Mr. Sparks had escorted Mrs. Fane round the gardens of the royal palace of Placentia. The Court was not in residence and they had not wasted long there, arriving back a full hour ahead of the other boat. Mrs. Fane made no accusations but her whole manner was eloquent of suspicion.

Then he sent young Tristram with Gouvernail into France to learn the language [said Book Eight of *Le Morte d'Arthur* (Venetia, unlike Perry, rarely began a book at its lawful beginning)], and there was Tristram more than seven years. And then when he well could speak the language, and had learned all that he might learn in that country, then he came home to his father, King Meliodas, again—

‘What ruff will you wear?’ said old Nurse, who had all the ruffs and collars spread on the bed.

‘The silver-pointed one,’ snapped Mrs. Fane. ‘What



else with that green gown and the pearls! Nurse, why must you turn the whole press upside-down to look for one item?’

Nurse was a thin and bony person, and jealous of Mrs. Fane, having nursed Venetia from the day she was born.

And so Tristram learned to be an harper passing all other [said *Morte d'Arthur*], that there were none such called in no country, and so on harping and on instruments of music he applied him in his youth for to learn.

That reminded Venetia that she was to sing to-night a song of Sir Philip Sidney's. She was greatly honoured as it had as yet only been read in manuscript by his close friends and was writ, they said, to Lady Rich, that was Penelope Devereux, so it rested with Venetia to sing her best—

And after as he grew in might and strength, he laboured ever in hunting and hawking, so that never gentleman more that ever——

‘Have you done with the hair, Patience? It is close on six now and Mistress Venetia must be ready to receive her guests.’

‘Just finishing, Mrs. Fane.’ Patience threaded in the last loop of pearls.

He began good measures of blowing of beasts of venery, and beasts of chase, and all manner of vermin, and all those terms we have yet of hawking and hunting.

‘ ’Tis coming up thick on the river,’ said Nurse, from behind the curtain. ‘Shouldn’t be astonished if to-morrow is damp.’

For every estate loved him, where that he went.

So ended the chapter on the upbringing of Tristram of Lyonesse.



HOLDING HERSELF VERY STRAIGHT, SHE SWEEP DOWNSTAIRS  
TO THE HALL

'Here are your silver shoes,' said Mrs. Fane. 'Put your book away and make haste.'

Venetia was ready. She stood up and surveyed herself in the mirror. Three freckles on her nose, and her face was rather flushed by sunburn, but it did not show in this light, and Mrs. Fane had not noticed. The silver-pointed ruff, her pearl ear-rings and the little seed-pearls glimmering in her copper-coloured hair, the sheen of the seawater-green dress and the swish of its soft folds, all was well and Venetia Mortimer felt ready to entertain the company.

Holding herself very straight, she swept downstairs to the hall. Her mother, painted by Veronese in all her grace of eighteen years, looked down on her as she went.

Her father, splendid in wine-coloured velvet, was waiting by the fire in the hall. He seemed to have retired into himself again and his voice was formal.

'We are taking our supper apart in the dining-chamber,' he said. 'Sir Philip is to sit on your right, Venetia. Mr. Raleigh may come and you are to leave the left place vacant for him.'

The first guests were already arriving. Perry, in a blue suit with ivory trimmings, solemn and important in his rôle of page, stood near the door. The doorman opened to the arrivals, the steward was ready to receive them, and when they had taken off their cloaks a yeoman announced them and passed them over to Perry, who conducted them across the hall to his father.

'Master Thomas Cavendish and Master Harriot.'

Thomas Cavendish, a magnificent, courtly, young man, came forward first. He was a Suffolk man and was rumoured to be living through his father's fortune at a royal pace. His manner was a shade over-confident with older and wiser men, but he had bright, pleasant eyes.



Thomas Harriot, who was the same age, was different—a quiet young man with a certain charm of manner that came from a sure knowledge of himself. He lived with Mr. Walter Raleigh as his resident mathematician. Venetia knew her father thought him a young man of brilliant brain and great learning.

‘Sir Philip Sidney.’

Sidney came across the room to join them, talking to Perry as he came. That was just like him. He was a tall, handsome man, a year or so younger than Nicholas Mortimer, clean-shaven, with auburn hair rather lighter in shade than Venetia’s own. There was that in Philip Sidney, quite apart from his genius, that made people his friends—like Sir Tristram ‘every estate loved him, where that he went’. From the Queen downwards the Court adored him, but he never seemed aware of it, and the long wearing inaction of Court life could not ruffle his serenity.

‘Good evening, Mistress Venetia,’ said Philip with his best bow, ‘and to you, sir. I hear you have been all day on the river.’

‘Yes, Philip,’ said Nicholas, ‘I played truant to-day. Shall we come into the inner room?’

‘Mr. Raleigh told me to tell you, sir,’ said Harriot, ‘that he will be with you this evening, a little later, having eaten elsewhere.’

‘That is good of him. I hardly expected him to come.’

There was a short, uneasy silence. Venetia profited by it to lead the way into the dining-chamber.

The table was set for supper, laid with a crimson cloth. Ten candles cast an aureole of light in the centre, reflecting in the polished glasses and shining on the massy silver plate. Firelight added to the warm welcome of the room but at the far end, behind Nicholas’s chair, the curtains

were drawn back to let in the April twilight. Six Yeomen of the Chamber stood at either side, still as heathen images in the shadows, with Mr. Sparks, the Gentleman Usher, at their head. Perry went straight across the room and took up his stand behind his father's chair.

Mr. Sparks helped Venetia into her place at the bottom of the table.

'You are at my right, Sir Philip,' she said, very much the lady of the house, 'you, Mr. Cavendish, on my father's right hand and Mr. Harriot his other side.' According to her instructions the stool on her left was vacant.

Her father said grace and they sat down. A fiddler, discreetly bestowed in a shadowy corner, began to play and the ceremony of supper opened.

'Venetia, my sweet, I had forgot,' said Philip, and put a little leather case into her hand. 'My present to you, with my love.'

In the case, on a cream velvet background, lay a brooch shaped like a dolphin, cut out of a moonstone. It had red rubies for eyes and each scale along its back was delicately wrought.

'Oh, Philip—Sir Philip, you should not—but how very glad I am that you did! Father, look!'

It was a breach of etiquette to call across the table but it just slipped out.

'You spoil my daughter, Sir Philip!' said her father. And Mr. Cavendish said something about the price of a virtuous woman being above rubies, which was out of holy writ. Venetia, as she pinned the dolphin on to her dress, at once ranged it in her mind with her most treasured presents—the Spanish *real*, and her *Morte d'Arthur*, and the dragon ink-pot—and, of course, Perry's falcon.

'Tell me about your river journey,' said Philip. She

was shy at first but he was not the sort of person to make mock of one, and soon she was describing everything, about going under London Bridge, and her mariner on the *Elizabeth Bonaventure*, and Perry's dam, and the lone goose they had seen flying north.

'I built dams once,' said Philip, 'when we lived at Ludlow. My sister Mary and I found a secret place by the river below the castle, and we used to call it our kingdom.'

'Had you many subjects?'

'Oh, many of them; two water rats and an old otter, who lived in the roots of a willow, and a whole colony of rooks. There were some toads too—Mary did not care for them. The rooks were a most clamorous people. We used to carry some of our lessons down and work them out by the water in the evenings.'

'Did you like your lessons?'

'I suppose I did. Mary was always so much quicker than I was that it was a sort of game to live up to her.'

'She is now the Countess of Pembroke, isn't she?'

'My sister? Yes. I have been staying with her down at Wilton of late and we worked together, as in the old days.'

'I find Master Ferrars a trifle dull,' confessed Venetia.

'That is his misfortune, to explain to you ill things he loves so well. But not every girl is born a blue-stockings.'

'I speak French and some Italian, and can construe Latin well enough,' said Venetia hastily, anxious not to be thought too ignorant. 'I have also written some verse but it would not rhyme very well.'

'We have all suffered from that difficulty,' said Philip gravely.

He turned his attention to Mr. Harriot, who was sitting silent on his other side. Venetia, having no one else to entertain, ate her supper quietly. How pleasant Philip

was! Much more pleasant really than Mr. Raleigh; she was not very sorry that his place was empty.

At this point Perry, from behind his father's chair, caught her eye and made a face, trying to make her laugh. This was very unjust. He had no right to grimace when on duty and it would be so unfortunate if she giggled in full view of her father.

The yeomen moved deftly to and fro and Mr. Sparks, glittering and rather insufferable as usual, kept an eye on the table, and a new fiddler came in place of the other. He played softly, but better, Venetia thought. The supper was going well. And what a banquet it was! There were oysters and salads, and fish eaten with sliced oranges; there was beef and lamb, chicken, quails and a roast peacock; and after that, cherry tart, jelly and almond pastries, and cheese from Holland and Auvergne. There were wines too, served in the finest set of Venetian glass—sherry, claret, muscatel, palermo and burgundy.

When the men had reached the cheese, and fruit and nuts were on the table, Nicholas Mortimer rose to his feet:

‘Gentlemen, I give you a toast. I think you all know in whose honour you are entertained this evening. To your hostess and my daughter, Venetia.’

‘To my sweetheart of long standing, from her humble knight and servant,’ said Philip Sidney.

‘Venetia!’ echoed the rest of the company. And they all stood up and drank to her.

The fiddler struck up a jig and Perry came in at the door, bearing a wonderful cake. It was made in the form of a chess-board, with chessmen in marchpane walking across the squares.

‘From the Master Cook, with compliments!’ Perry announced, and put it down before her. As he did so he whispered, ‘You may have a chess-board but mine



was a fort with cannons and artillery in sugar looking out of it!

Perry was feeling his nose somewhat out of joint to-night!

While Venetia cut her cake into slices, her father dismissed the yeomen. Mr. Sparks placed the decanter of red wine before him.

'Open one of the windows, before you go!' said Nicholas. 'This room goes unbearably close.'

A breath of sweet, damp air came in on them. Mr. Sparks left the room.

'What else besides the silver coin did you have for your birthday?' said Philip to Venetia.

'From father *Le Morte d'Arthur*, by Sir Thomas Malory. Oh, do you like it, Sir Philip?'

'Like it! It is like a call of trumpets!'

'Would you care to see my copy?'

'Very much.'

Her father was deep in converse with Masters Cavendish and Harriot. Venetia slipped out and ran upstairs. In her room two candles were burning on the dressing-table, like two stars, and a fire glowed in the fire-place. Her night-robe and slippers were laid out and her bed opened ready.

'Not yet,' whispered Venetia to the room at large. 'I am eleven to-day!'

She was some time finding her silver *real*, but the *Morte d'Arthur* was still lying by her mirror where she had left it. She had marked a passage she wanted to read to Philip Sidney.

She went softly back down the stairs. At the far corner of the hall were lights and voices, where the steward presided over the table where Mrs. Fane, Mr. Sparks, the Gentlemen Ushers and ladies ate apart. The servants

had already finished their supper and the rest of the great room was in shadow.

A little study led out of the hall at the foot of the stairs, before the door of the dining-chamber, and she heard her father's voice inside. He sounded as if he were just coming out, and as Venetia did not wish to be caught in the act of deserting her guests, even at the request of Sir Philip Sidney, she drew back against the shadow of the staircase and waited.

Her father's voice came up to the door, but another man came out in front of him. He wore a cloak of black velvet richly studded with pearls; by his voice, which was pitched high and had a distinct west-country slur, Venetia knew Mr. Walter Raleigh, the Queen's new favourite.

'Are you certain you are wise? I can furnish you with a ship if you need it, but the sands are running out.'

'Thank you, Mr. Raleigh, but I have decided on my best course. And nothing can now develop before morning. But come in and have some wine, if no food can tempt you.'

They moved on into the dining-chamber with Venetia hard on their heels. Ships again! The theories and schemes about ships she had overheard in her lifetime!

'Where is Venetia?' demanded her father. 'Ah, Venetia, Mr. Raleigh has arrived. It is Venetia's birthday this evening.—There is no need to present the rest of the company.'

Venetia achieved her curtsy and they all sat down, Mr. Raleigh starting to talk at once to Thomas Cavendish. He was a very handsome man with a dark beard and deep blue eyes. He dressed with sombre magnificence, with pearls at his ears and rings on his long sensitive fingers. Sir Nicholas and Thomas Harriot were talking. Venetia showed Philip her *real* and the *Morte d'Arthur*.



‘What a wealth of romance and adventure in so small a space! There is a marker fallen out of it here—do you want to keep the place?’

‘I wanted to read it to you,’ said Venetia, very shyly.

‘Read on, sweet heart!’

‘It is the place where Tristram comes to Arthur’s Court.’ Venetia, flushed and a trifle hesitating, began to read:

‘Welcome, Sir Tristram. Welcome, said the damosels. Welcome said knights. Welcome, said Arthur, for one of the best knights, and the gentlest of the world, and the man of most worship; for of all manner of hunting thou bearest the prize, and of all measures of blowing thou art the beginning, and of all the terms of hunting and hawking ye are the beginner, of all instruments of music ye are the best; therefore, gentle knight, said Arthur, ye are welcome to this court.’

‘Why did you read that?’ asked Philip.

Venetia looked up at him, meeting those quiet, fearless eyes.

‘It—it reminded me of you.’

‘Thank you,’ said Philip gently. ‘I wish I deserved that.’

In the pause that followed, Perry came in with a large lute. Very solemn and a little excited, he fetched himself a stool and sat down beside the fire, watching his father.

‘My son is about to sing,’ said Nicholas. ‘What have we, Peregrine?’

‘A Lyke-Wake Dirge,’ said Perry.

It was his own somewhat morbid choice; he had insisted upon it. His clear, cool, boy’s voice somehow missed the pathos of the song, but there was a fine old Catholic ring to the refrain—

‘This ae night, this ae night,  
—Every night and all,  
Fire and fleet and candlelight,  
And Christ receive thy soul.’

The last echo died before the company applauded.

'Now for my song, Venetia,' said Philip Sidney.

With a little rustle of satin, Venetia took her brother's place on the stool by the fire. She plucked one of the strings and paused. They were all looking at her, young Master Cavendish, picking at his teeth with a little gold pick; Master Harriot, kindly and absorbed; Mr. Walter Raleigh, turning the stem of a glass, the wine in it glowing to match the rubies on his fingers; Sir Philip Sidney, who had written the song to his beautiful Stella; her father, brooding and remote. Venetia found, to her surprise, that she was not in the least afraid.

'Who is it that this dark night  
Underneath my window plaineth?  
It is one who from thy sight  
Being, ah, exiled, disdaineth  
Every other vulgar light.'

She heard her voice singing on, clear and true, not without wistfulness.

'Well, in absence this will die;  
Leave to see, and leave to wonder.  
Absence, sure, will help if I  
Can learn how much myself to sunder  
From what in my heart doth lie.

But time will these thoughts remove;  
Time doth work what no man knoweth—  
Time doth as the subject prove;  
With time still the affection groweth  
In the faithful turtle dove.'

It was a long song but she remembered it to the very last:

'Oh unjust is Fortune's sway,  
Which can make me thus to leave you  
And from lowts to run away.'

They were all still sitting there, motionless, except that Sidney and Raleigh both turned and looked at Nicholas Mortimer. He was in the shadow, his chair pushed back from the candlelight, the window behind him open to the April night and the river.

'You sang it beautifully, child,' said Philip.

'And it is a beautiful song,' said Mr. Harriot.

Walter Raleigh rose and helped her to her chair again. Her father said nothing.

'I hear Sir Humphrey Gilbert's fleet still waits the wind at Plymouth,' said Mr. Harriot to Raleigh.

'Not the wind alone that delays it! Humphrey always has ado to get himself away! I shall be deeply interested, Nicholas, to know how my ship, the *Bark Raleigh*, carries herself on this first voyage. She is the fruit of my recent studies on speed and balance in naval construction.—It would have been better still to have sailed in her myself!'

'You are not going then, Mr. Raleigh?' asked Cavendish.

'No.' Raleigh could not keep the savage bitterness out of his voice. 'God knows, I tried.'

'It seems that your brother himself only got his permission by the skin of his teeth,' said Sidney—Humphrey Gilbert was Raleigh's half-brother.

'Even so. Her Majesty had heard it said that he is a man of no good hap by sea. But all is well enough now.'

'Do you believe in such things?' asked Nicholas Mortimer suddenly.

'What—the legend of bad luck at sea?—the legend of an unlucky man, an unlucky ship?—I think not.'

'Men who work lifelong in deep waters are too wise to be unbelievers,' said Harriot quietly.

It was like what her father had said to Venetia in the marshes, about Master Leonardo's flying machines. In this age of science and discovery, only fools are unbelievers.

They went on discussing the voyage. Philip Sidney spoke of two Catholic gentlemen who were going out to run the plantation in Florida.

'To me it is a marvellous concession that these two loyal subjects have been given such a chance to redeem themselves by building the colony, in freedom of conscience and worship. It is the start of something great. If they can do it in Florida, why not in other places?'

'Why not indeed?' said Raleigh, leaning across the table, his slashed silver sleeve catching the light. 'Up and down the length of the continent, and not only loyal Catholic gentlemen but good honest-to-God members of the Reformed Church.'

The voices rose and fell, the red wine glowed in the thin glasses, the candles danced before Venetia's eyes, as the sunlight had danced on the river. It was the talk of men with men. Colonies and ships—she saw again the big hulls around her, the *Lion* of London, the *Desire*, the *Elizabeth Bonaventure*, heard the hammering and the shouting, smelt the paint and tar. . .

Mr. Harriot's voice brought her back into the candle-lit room.

'Well, where would *you* go, Mr. Cavendish, with one tall ship and the world before you?'

'In view of my pocket, that has but one answer! Up and down the Main a-privateering, taking a treasure ship here, sacking a town there—Drake knows how.'

'But taking nothing into consideration but your own sweet will, where would you sail then?'

Cavendish gave a slow grin:

'Why, up and down the Main a-privateering, as before. Think of coming home up Thames-side bulging with moidores, with the very sails of cloth of gold, and



the seamen clothed in silk with diamonds in their ears. There's a pleasant fate for any tall ship!

'Since we play this boy's game, I will have my say!' said Philip. 'I would be free to go along of my Catholic gentlemen to Florida, which means the land of flowers——'

'Call it Arcadia and have done with it!' commented Raleigh.

'And help them there to plant and rule a land where men are free to serve their own souls. Call it Arcadia or Utopia or what you will, I believe it will come at the end.'

'I too,' said Raleigh. 'It is one of the few things I do entirely believe in. That and Manoa.' He drained his glass. 'There lies my desire. Manoa, away up the Orinoco river, in the state of Guiana. It is the great imperial city of the Inca, a city so rich that the very flowers and trees of its pleasure gardens are wrought in silver and gold. That it is still to be found, across the mountains and beyond the labyrinth of rivers which confuse that land, has been indisputably proved by Martinez, Lopez and others Spanish travellers; they call it "El Dorado", the Golden. I would fit my tall ship for exploration, man her with a crew of haughty hearts, and to Guiana would I go—and shall go yet—God willing.'

It was the turn of Nicholas Mortimer. His voice, after Raleigh's, was wonderfully deep:

'I am of Richard Grenville's mind.' He cleared the table before him with a sweep of his elbow and set a little silver pepper-box in the open space. 'My ship,' said Nicholas. 'This fruit here is the coast of New Spain. Right away there by the candlestick, across the great South Sea, lies Cathay. Here'—he took a dish of sugared almonds and moved it into place—'are Solomon's Isles—the Isles of Gold. This way came Magellan, and this way Frankie Drake in '79.' He traced two lines with his

nail across the crimson damask table-cover. 'These waters below have never been charted. What lies in them no man knows for sure, though Marco Polo had a fair idea from what he heard tell.

'My tall ship sails from New Spain west-south-west, into these uncharted seas. Turning aside neither for faintness, nor hazards, nor any kind of wonders, I sail on, west-south-westerly, until I make my landfall in the lost continent—Terra Australis. We know it lies there, somewhere, waiting for us, a country fair and temperate, more full of gold than Cathay itself, or than your Manoa, Mr. Raleigh, the burial place of kings——'

Venetia watched the little silver pepper-box sail on across the crimson damask of the table-cover, like a ship indeed. All sail set she ran before the wind, and the white wave-tops whipped up around her, and Terra Australis lay waiting just over the round horizon. Perhaps a ship's boy in the rigging would see it first and cry 'Land!' the wind blowing through his hair, a boy like Perry only a little older—

'The night indeed wears on,' said the persuasive voice that belonged to Mr. Walter Raleigh.

Venetia saw the tall windows open to the garden, with moths coming in to the candlelight. Shadows were moving around her, where she lay against Sir Philip's shoulder.

'High time the children were in bed!' said her father. 'They have been sleeping this hour past and it is close on midnight.'

He got up and rang a bell.

'It has been a fine evening. Gentlemen, thank you. Mr. Trevor, show my guests to their horses. Good night, Thomas. Good night, Mr. Harriot.'

'Good night, Venetia, sweet heart,' Philip smiled at her, his grey eyes shining and very much alive. He stood



up. 'Good night, Nicholas. You know I am at your call, always and any time.'

'Philip, I know it. Good night.'

Sir Philip Sidney followed the others out.

Then Walter Raleigh and Nicholas Mortimer faced each other.

'You still insist on staying?'

'Yes, Mr. Raleigh, I do.'

'Well, good luck be with you. It will blow over, I doubt not; I will speak for you if trouble comes.'

'It was good of you, of all men, to come to my house to-night.' Nicholas walked with him to the door, 'Good night, and thank you.'

When Mr. Raleigh had gone, Venetia saw her father standing in the doorway alone. He was as distant as always, taller, more splendid, and yet so lonely that she would have run to him if she had dared.

Then he came back into the room and went over to Perry, who slept blissfully on a pile of cushions, and shook him till he woke. Venetia herself was now wide awake. Her father held out his hand to her.

'Mrs. Fane will scold me royally for this,' he said. 'My second encroachment of her rights! She and Nurse will be in wait for you on the stairs.'

But in the hall they met, not Mrs. Fane or Nurse, but Barney the doorman and three armed men.

'Sir Nicholas Mortimer?' said the foremost of them, civilly enough.

Nicholas turned sharply to the servant:

'Take Master Peregrine and Mistress Venetia upstairs to Mrs. Fane without delay and tell her to put them both to bed. Good night, Peregrine; good night, Venetia.'

As they went up the staircase, Barney the doorman holding the light high, Venetia looked up at the portrait

of her mother that was painted by Veronese in Venice. She heard her father say:

‘I am Sir Nicholas Mortimer. Your business?’

She stared, stared at the portrait, and the blow fell—

‘Sir Nicholas Mortimer, I place you under arrest in the Queen’s name!’



‘I AM SIR NICHOLAS MORTIMER. YOUR BUSINESS?’

## Chapter 4

### IN THE GALLERY

ON the afternoon of the second day after their father's arrest, the children were sitting in the long gallery, Perry with his nose drearily pressed against the window, staring out at the rain, and Venetia at the virginals, trying to concentrate on her exercises. Her mind kept wandering, as it had done the last two days, whether she was grappling with Lily's *Grammar*, or Record's *Arithmetic*, or with logic or cosmography (she usually enjoyed maps and globes). She ran her fingers up and down the keys in a monotonous little refrain, like the patter of the rain on the tiles outside. There were two fires burning in the gallery but the damp had crept in and it was chilly.

The door at the far end opened and Sir Philip Sidney walked in.

When they saw who it was they both made a wild rush. Here at last was some one to trust, a friend.

'Well, Venetia, Peregrine?—what woeful faces to match the weather!' He came down the gallery with Perry clinging hard to one hand and Venetia on the other arm. He was neither unnaturally hearty nor composed for a burial, just his quiet self. His grey suit was splashed with mud.

'Come by the fire, you must be wet and cold,' said Venetia.

'A very fair idea. No need for a stool, Perry, what is a rug for but to sit on?' And he sat down on the hearthrug, the firelight shining on his auburn-coloured hair. The children sat on either side of him, mute, expectant.



'I went to visit your father this morning. He is in the Marshalsea Prison in Southwark. He has a small room but not ill-furnished, with a rug, a table and a press to store his clothes. He is waited on and the food is good enough, and I have just arranged with Master Ferrars and the usher to send him more books and various necessaries he is in need of. He walks twice a day in a little garden. The governor of the prison allowed me half an hour with him this morning and, all things considered, he was not low in spirits.'

'What is going to happen?' whispered Venetia.

'It is full early to say. I suppose the matter will come up before the Council in due course. It would not have made such a stir if Bodrugan had been less influential. —You know what happened, of course?'

'Father killed a man in a fight in the street,' said Perry quickly.

'Well, that is only half the story. Bodrugan was a difficult, hasty fellow, not over-beloved—God rest his soul. He had considerable mercantile interests in London (Sir Thomas Gresham helped him along at the start, they say) and also property in Cornwall. He had a great bent for law-suits. Wherever he went he left a trail of them; the biggest case, which is still in the courts, is against one Sir John Treherne of Cornwall, or his dependents. For some reason which nobody knows, Bodrugan took a strong dislike to your father and several times tried to provoke a quarrel. When your father was returning from Court late the other night with one of his ushers, four men set upon them. Two of them were undoubtedly hired murderers, but during the ensuing *mêlée* your father recognized William Bodrugan, rather observing than leading the fray, and called him out to defend himself in open combat. The hirelings faded away at this stage and Bodrugan and

Nicholas fought it out then and there, the usher and Bodrugan's servant willy-nilly as seconds. Bodrugan was no mean swordsman, but your father had learnt his rapier-play in Italy, and when he is roused I would prefer to be his friend than his enemy! Bodrugan was killed outright in open fight. Your father in no way tried to evade the consequences, he knew they would soon arrest him and refused to listen to all persuasion to escape, though Raleigh could have arranged for a ship to take him across at any hour. He said he was no felon and would stay; he was only sorry they came when they did, without waiting for morning.'

'The fight—when did it take place?' asked Venetia.

'The night before we came to supper, the eve of your birthday.'

'So he knew all that day on the river!'

It was coming back to her now—the strangeness in his eyes when she had come in on her birthday morning, his unusual decision to stay away from the Court and go out with them alone. The whole of that lovely sunlit day he had known—and she had been so happy, and so blind! But he had been happy, too, of that Venetia was sure. He had unbent to them as never before, speaking of so many things, and even when he had recalled his married life in Venice he had not seemed unhappy—rather to find content in so golden a memory.

Then she saw him watching the goose flying north and remembered his words: 'Of all living things, the wild goose is most free!' and how he had held her hands on the way home. Closing her eyes, she could hear his deep voice repeating, 'I too shall remember. Whatever comes between us in the future, we share this day——'

'We joked about prisons,' said Perry on a note like a sob, —'Remember, Venetia? And father told me to sit down.'



'He does not wish you to visit him now,' said Philip gently. 'He says he wants you to think of him as he was with you on the river.—He will not be imprisoned for long, you know, or so we hope. With Walter Raleigh his friend and all powerful, we should get him a complete pardon within the year.'

'Then he won't be beheaded!' gulped Perry.

'Don't be so silly, Perry!' scolded his sister, but she had wondered more than once.

'Oh, nothing like that,' said Philip cheerfully. 'Take my kerchief, Perry. My nose always runs in cold weather too. I think when he first gets his pardon he may have to retire to the country for a while, but this time next year the whole business will be forgotten. He has some country estates, has he not?'

'I think some farms and things somewhere on the Welsh border,' said Venetia vaguely.

'Now, the next question we come to is you two. Your father is making provision for you to leave London; Mrs. Fane is to stay here at Mortimer House in charge, and your father has written to a friend of his, Sir John Treherne.'

'The one who was at law with Bodrugan?'

'Yes. Do you know him?'

'I saw him once with father,' said Perry, '—a great big man with a black beard and a loud voice.'

'Where did we see him, Perry?'

'You weren't there, Venetia.'

'When was it then?'

'I was with father once somewhere.'

'I believe you're making it up!'

'—as I was saying,' said Philip Sidney, quietly but firmly, 'he has written and the answer should arrive within a fortnight. It seems certain Sir John will agree to

take you for the summer. He lives at Pendellion in Cornwall, by the sea, and has children about your age, horses, hounds, hawks—in fact it sounds a good life to me, for a while.’

‘I would rather stay in London,’ said Venetia.

‘And I,’ echoed Perry, determined to be gloomy. ‘Of course *if* I could take my horse, and the dogs, and all our falcons, and the ferrets——’

‘You probably will, and half your furniture to boot,’ said Philip, but he was too wise a man to start praising Pendellion at that moment. ‘Well, you two, I have got to go.’

‘Oh, *must* you,’ from both at once.

‘I hate to leave you and the fire, but I must. Your father is writing to you to-night and he wished to hear from both of you.’

‘How do we address it?’ asked Perry, ‘—Sir Nicholas Mortimer, The Marshalsea Prison.’

‘Something like that. Here is some horrid confectionary for you, almond sugar, I think.’

Amid their thanks he went to the door, glad to see the bewilderment had gone out of their eyes.

‘Will we see you before we go?’ asked Perry.

‘Indeed you will.’

Philip seemed their only friend, now the bottom had fallen out of their world. Venetia could not help murmuring as they said good-bye:

‘I wish Cornwall were not so far away.’

And Philip answered:

‘Now I can quote your own *Morte d’Arthur* at you: “I am a knight errant, said Sir Launcelot, who rideth forth to seek many adventures.”’

## *Chapter 5*

### PENDELLION

BUT it is not so easy to imagine yourself a knight errant, reflected Venetia, with Nurse and Patience jolting about on the seat opposite, their faces hot and shining, and at each lurch of the coach the box of jewellery tipping on to your feet. It had been falling over in that annoying fashion during each one of the nine days of the journey into the west. It was now the tenth day, about three o'clock, and Venetia sincerely hoped it would be the last. The hustle of packing and departure, the farewells to the household, and to William the waterman and Barney the doorman, Mrs. Fane's smothering embrace at the end (how Perry had hated it!) and that last view of them in the courtyard of Mortimer House—Mr. Sparks, the butler and the steward, Mrs. Fane blowing her nose with a sound like a trumpet—all was already like a dream, so much had happened since.

They had both missed Mrs. Fane, at first. She had stood for security. At one moment life had seemed as if it could never change and then, with appalling suddenness, their father had been taken away to prison, they had said good-bye to the Strand, and Mrs. Fane's loving tyranny was become a thing of the past. The journey had been amusing to start with, the road and the inns at nights, but the novelty had worn off and it was not very pleasant being cooped up in the coach the whole day long. For Perry, riding, it was different.

A horse's hoofs clattered alongside, a fresh cloud of

powdery dust blew in, and Perry leaned down to pull back the curtains and look in at them.

'We are coming down to Allenbridge,' he announced. 'Ha ha, look at you all coated with dust! It's windy as sin up here.'

There was a frosty silence as the hoofs thudded away again to the front.

'I like that!' exclaimed Patience, only too painfully aware of the dirt engrained on her pretty face. 'Let Master Peregrine come in here for an hour and see as if he keeps a-laughin'. Pardon me, Mistress Venetia, was that your foot?'

'No, it's that confounded jewel-box again.'

'Well really, what next!' scolded Nurse, "'confounded"—"windy as sin"—a fine way Sir Nicholas would be in, hearing the pair of you swearing grooms' language at every breath. "Nurse," he would say to me, "'tis not right, Nurse, that's what it isn't." I hope Sir John Treherne and his lady will take you to task right quickly.'

Venetia yawned politely behind her hand. It wasn't grooms' language, it was biblical! But she wished Nurse would not keep talking of her father, as if she didn't think of him enough already, further and further away from them now, with each milestone on the road.

And so they lurched and rattled down the hill into Allenbridge, with the baggage and furniture wagons, the grooms and horses and the pack-mules trailing behind, all in a rare dust.

Venetia and Patience got out in the inn yard to stretch their cramped legs. The four coach horses were sweating, stamping and steaming, stable hinds bustled to and fro with buckets and wisps, the coachman was adjusting the harness. The cortège was so ungainly and long that it could not get into the yard but straggled away down the



main street of Allenbridge, causing much shouting and cursing because it was market day, and the town already full of cattle and sheep.

An old stable hind from the inn came forward and looked doubtfully at Venetia, as she stood with Perry, he with his pony's rein over his arm.

'Would you be Mortimer by name, little lady?' he spoke with the rich turn of words that belonged to the west country. 'Master Treherne's asking after you.'

'Our name is Mortimer,' said Perry, very grand.

The old man went back into the inn. Two minutes later a young man and a boy of about fourteen came bearing down on them, threading their way in and out of the horses' heels.

'Good afternoon,' said the boy. 'I am Christopher Treherne and have come to meet you. My father regrets he could not come himself but he is over to Padstow to-day about a ship. This is Mr. Erisey.'

Mr. Erisey was a tall young man with brown curly hair, a gleam in his eye and the hint of a swagger in the swing of his cloak.

Michael Erisey, your servant, ma'am! I am secretary, usher and general factotum to Sir John.'

Venetia curtsied very correctly, as she would do greeting her father's guests in the hall in the Strand, instead of standing, all dusty and dishevelled, in a crowded inn yard on a hot May afternoon.

'My name is Venetia Mortimer, and this is my brother, Peregrine. It was most kind of you to come so far to find us.'

'Pardon, lady,' said a groom, pushing past with a shovel.

'Oh, it's only a matter of some six miles,' said Christopher. 'Are you tired of travelling?'



'We seem to have been on the road for ever!' said Venetia, with such fervour that she surprised even herself and the young man called Michael Erisey laughed.

'I tell you what we will do,' he said, '—you ride, I suppose?'

'Of course I do!'

'Good. Then you and your brother will ride on with us to Pendellion, and leave the coach and baggage to follow after at their leisure. Our man can show them the way.'

'Oh, *shall I?*' cried Venetia.

'Will Nurse let you?' said Perry rather dampingly. Venetia felt no more than six years old.

'Leave Nurse to me,' said Mr. Erisey. 'Where is she—in the coach?' And he was gone in a flash.

'Michael could melt a stone,' said Christopher. 'Your Nurse won't have a chance! Where is your horse?'

Venetia gave orders for her side-saddle to be put on *Grey Mortimer*, her pony, and Perry went off to tell Master Ferrars of the change of plan.

'We had best mount here,' said Christopher, standing against the wall of the inn. 'It is worse out in the street.' He looked up at the swinging sign above his head. 'This place is called "The Horseman's Rest", a pun on the Grenville coat-of-arms. Anything less restful would be hard to seek! All well, Michael?'

'Nurse and I have come to an excellent understanding,' said Michael Erisey, tipping his hat back and smiling at Venetia. 'She said she supposed I was what I said I was, and that Mistress Venetia has the wrong dress for riding, and that she didn't know she was sure, and then I brought all the Erisey charm to bear and, behold, we are ready to start! Have you called the horses, Christo?'

'Not yet.'

'I might have guessed it! Hi, Rowe, Jewell!—where the plague have they hidden themselves!'

It was a pleasure to Venetia to see her *Grey Mortimer's* wise face appearing through the mob. Christopher gave her a leg into the saddle, Perry vaulted on to his pony, showing off, and soon they were safely away, climbing the hill out of Allenbridge on the road to Pendellion.

It was a relief to be free of the clatter and the crowd, the dust and the din, with the wagons and pack-animals, and the jostling and smells of the market all behind them in the little grey town on the estuary. It was good to be riding *Grey Mortimer* again, after the jolting of the coach, to be clear of the dust kicked up by the hoofs in front, to be able to take a look at the country. They climbed the steep hill into the sun.

'There is a fine view up over,' said Christopher beside her. 'It will give you the lie of the land. Have you come west before?'

'Never. We live in London.'

Christopher, and Michael Erisey too, spoke with the same rich slur that Venetia remembered in the voice of Mr. Walter Raleigh. It was persuasive and pleasant. She looked sideways at her companion. He had very fair hair and a golden brown skin, and he was tall for his age.

They rode on uphill, into a rising gale. At the summit they came out on a soggy stretch of moorland and the whole country opened out around them—a bare bleached land swept by the relentless wind, the clean outlines unbroken by a single tree. To the left the changing levels swooped away to the moors, as if painted in great brush strokes by a master.

'Those are the moors above Bodmin,' said Christopher. 'The tors in the distance are Brown Willy and Rowtor. You are clear of England now, this is Cornwall.'

'Are there no trees?' Venetia heard herself saying. Christopher stiffened in his saddle.

'There are a plenty of trees down in the valleys. The woods are hidden in the folds of the hills.'

Venetia blushed miserably. She had said quite the wrong thing. And she had no idea what a tor was.

So this was Cornwall, this bleak, windswept, alien land, this bare bones of a country! Her eyes travelled round, to where the red splash of a ploughed field broke the spring green of the slopes, to scattered churches with gaunt grey towers, each crowned by four pinnacles of stone, to a hard silver streak to the westward putting a boundary to the hills and the sky.

'That is the sea,' said Christopher, and added for her benefit, '—the Atlantic.'

They rode on in silence. The highway ran along the shoulder of a ridge, parallel to the sea, between banks of flaming gorse. The wind, coming in from the north-west, blasted at them all the time. Christopher's fair hair blew wildly into his eyes; Erisey's cloak tugged at his shoulders like a live thing.

'Blowing a little to-day,' he remarked casually.

'Does it always blow down here?' asked Perry.

Now he had done it too! Venetia blushed again, this time for her brother. They were making a bad impression on the Treherne's before they had even crossed their threshold. But Erisey answered quite naturally.

'The high ground usually catches it, from whatever quarter. We grow used to it. What nice-looking horses you have! We are very hard up for horses in these parts.'

He and Perry went on talking about horses, Perry talking rather grandly, Mr. Erisey sympathetic, amused. Venetia felt an appalling wave of home-sickness come over her. She wanted to be back in her room at Mortimer

House, looking out on the sheltered spring garden and the river. She wanted to hear her father's deep voice in the hall, to see Sir Philip Sidney riding to call and Mrs. Fane sailing down to the stillroom, and to have round her all the dear sights and sounds of home.

'Was that your schoolmaster in the long cloak on a roan mare?' said Christopher at her side, and Venetia realized for the first time that he, too, was feeling shy and awkward.

'Yes—Master Ferrars. Is there one at your home?'

'An astonishing fellow called Sosthenes Brent. I work with the parson now because I am going up to Cambridge in the spring, but the others all slave for old Sosthenes, except Frances, who is still in the nursery. He never did teach us much. Venn, who is without shame, makes silly little rhymes about him and pins them up on walls.'

'Is Venn one of your family?'

'My brother, Trevennor. He is about your age, I think.'

'Who else is there?'

'Well, Peter is my younger brother, and Thomasine and Frances my sisters. Then there's Merryn—Aunt Merryn we should call her, I suppose, but we never do. And Mistress Bassett. And mother, of course.'

'Who is your Aunt Merryn?'

'She was married to Uncle Peter, father's young brother. He sailed with Gilbert in 'seventy-eight and was killed by the Spaniards. She's very young to be a widow. Come to that, I believe you will be waiting on her—you will like her.'

'Is Mr. Erisey a relation?'

'Michael? Why yes, I suppose he's a sort of cousin. He has come to help father with his business on the estate. He is a wonderful fellow. We couldn't do without Michael.'



'What are you saying about me?' shouted Michael Erisey, coming alongside into the wind.

'I am trying to explain the household to Venetia.'

'Alas for her then!—she will never remember. Shall we take the lower road, Christo? Then we might hear ourselves speak.'

And suddenly they were down in the shelter of a coombe. There were trees here, all of a rounded pattern, leaning away from the sea wind. It was warm and smelt sweet. Primroses, campion and blue wild hyacinths grew among the bracken on the banks. It was like coming into a different country. And yet above on the high road, the wind was still roaring over the bleak uplands.

Michael Erisey was riding with Venetia now. He glanced at her, his high-crowned hat as usual, tilted back on his head, his voice oddly understanding:

'You'll get used to us all soon enough. Pendellion is a house always full of people, coming and going, each one of us absorbed in his own affairs, taking little or no notice of the other. But we are happy in our various ways.'

'I hear that I will be waiting on young Mrs. Treherne. Do you think she will like me?'

'I am sure of it. And she is very easy to like. You know that her husband was killed?'

'Christopher told me. Is she beautiful?'

Mr. Erisey hesitated, for the first time.

'Yes. Did Christo tell you that, too?'

Venetia did not answer. She did not know why she had thought that Mrs. Merryn Treherne was beautiful, unless it was some intuition from Michael Erisey's manner when he spoke of her.

They came to a village. A few grey cottages clustered on the green floor of the valley, by a stream, and above them soared the great pinnacled tower of the church.



'St. Ruan,' said Mr. Erisey. 'Our village. As you can see, a veritable whirlpool of teeming life! There is the Vicar. Good day, Master Specott.'

'Good afternoon, Mr. Erisey.' The Vicar was a big man with a bold leonine head. 'And to you, Christopher. I will be up at the house by ten o'clock to-morrow and will bring my new *Horace*.'

'So it has arrived, sir! Splendid!' said Christopher, winking at Michael Erisey.

'Excellent man, the vicar,' said Erisey to Venetia as they rode on. 'He has ten children—that's the worst of the Reformation! He shines at his brightest when we have a run of shipwrecks, then he buries the mariners with tremendous pomp and ceremony. It is no laughing matter, God knows, but he is so touchingly elated when there is a real good burial on hand.'

'Are there many shipwrecks here, Mr. Erisey?'

Erisey turned to her and his eyes were serious, for once.

'This is one of the worst reaches of coast in all Britain. You will see it for yourself—great raw teeth of rock, cliffs up to three hundred feet and the devil's own cross-currents. Given a dirty night and a full-force westerly gale and God help a ship that lays in too close to the shore!'

They came to an old stone well at a crossways.

'St. Ruan's well, so called,' said Michael Erisey. 'Now we enter Pendellion estate.'

They turned in under an archway along an avenue that plunged through deep woods. It was still sheltered here, the slopes of the valley closing them in, and the stillness was broken only by wood-pigeons and the quiet sound of falling water. The sun filtering through the young beech leaves, fell on a white mist among the roots, and, on

looking more closely, Venetia saw it was a carpet of starry white flowers.

'Ramsons,' said Erisey, following her glance, '—wild garlic. We call it ramsey around here.'

A jay screamed and rustled in the branches overhead. Christopher's and Michael Erisey's horses snatched at their bits and broke into an eager sidestep. *Grey Mortimer* was tired and his ears flopped in a dispirited fashion. 'Cheer up,' whispered Venetia to him, 'we are nearly there.'

The road began to climb. They came to a gate, and beyond it to open pasture, and they rode out from under the trees and up the hill into the west. The sun was slanting straight into their eyes and Venetia was for a moment blinded. She looked back. As they rose steeply the valley opened out behind them, the woods, the pinnacles of St. Ruan church tower down by the river, the wide arc of the slopes. Ahead of them the path went over a blind skyline. Anything might lie beyond—the sea, the sky—anything.

'I'll announce your coming,' cried Christo suddenly and, laughing, set spurs to his horse. He clattered up the path and showed on the brow, black against the golden west. He looks like Sir Launcelot or Galahad, thought Venetia inconsequently in that brief instant before he vanished.

They followed him, riding three abreast. A blast of wind smote them again, the sun beat down on them, they topped the crest.

Pendellion!

There it stood, rising from its lawns and terraces on a shoulder of the hill, a great grey house, massive, stately, proudly daring the four winds of heaven. The trees around it were bent nearly double by the force of the gales. Beyond, fields ran out to the coast and the sea all along the horizon shone like a shield.

And suddenly Venetia felt very small and shy and strange. Pendellion, this great house full of people coming and going, pre-occupied with their own concerns, it was not her home, hers or Perry's. And yet a moment before it had been so beautiful and so splendid. For some absurd reason she wanted to cry.

'Welcome to Pendellion!' said Christopher, standing on the steps below the high porch. 'Mother, this is Venetia, and this Peregrine.'

He helped her down and she found herself curtsying to a small, vague-looking lady in green, who kissed her kindly on both cheeks. There were other people grouped behind and more of them in the hall. 'My daughter Thomasine, my boy Peter. Peter, where is Trevennor? Mistress Bassett. Mr. Farnaby, who is staying here. Mr. Rowland Mundy who lives here. Mr. Brent. My youngest daughter Frances.—Peter, where is Trevennor?'

Venetia's head swam, and she could not see clearly in the cool shade of the interior after those dazzling minutes' riding into the sun. She felt a hand close over hers and Michael Erisey drew her apart towards a window.

'Mrs. Treherne, may I present to you your new gentlewoman, Venetia Mortimer. She has been travelling without respite for ten days and I think she is very tired.'

'Thank you, Michael,' said a young voice, with that same soft lilt to it. 'Venetia, I am Merryn Treherne. Come up to my room and you can wash and be easy till your gear arrives.'

She *was* beautiful, tall, with small delicate features, eyes of a most startling blue, and dark, smooth hair, brushed high.

'What a foolish plan,' said Lady Treherne, 'bringing the poor child on ahead of her furniture and maids. Christo, show Peregrine his room, and pray be in time for

supper, dear, your father will be home by then. Peter, be pleased to go and find your brother Trevennor. Where is he to, I wonder?’

Venetia followed Merryn Treherne upstairs to her room. It was a big sunny chamber filled with flowers, but the view was towards the coast and the panes rattled with each gust of wind. Venetia sat down on the window-seat suddenly desolate.

It was then that Merryn came and sat beside her.

‘I know how you feel,’ she said quietly, ‘I know it too well. But you will be happy here, Venetia. And if it is not your home, you will find Pendellion the next best thing in the world.’

## Chapter 6

### TREVENNOR TREHERNE

A HUNTING horn rang out, full and clear, in the golden morning. Venetia woke, for a moment bewildered, unable to grasp where she was. Then the long shivering horn blast came again, ringing in her first day at Pendellion, and she scrambled out of bed into her long gown and ran to the window.

She was looking down into a big stable-yard, surrounded on two sides by the wings of the house and on the other two by kennels and stables. It must be early; the light still held the cool radiance of dawn. It was a light that flooded over everything in a smooth wash, so that even the drips from the gutter in the roof sparkled like crystal, and there was silver on the pigeons' wings.

In the centre of the yard a huntsman was standing among his hounds, blowing them to him. There were two other men there, grooms or yeomen, both with long sticks in their hands, and they were coupling up the hounds for exercise. With them, his fair hair shining so brightly that it seemed almost white, was Christopher Treherne. He wore an old pair of breeches, boots and an open shirt, and he too carried a staff. Venetia could hear him calling the hounds by name:

*'Silver, Silver boy to him, to him! Fury, here Fury, good dog! Hey there Belman, hike, hike!'*

The yard was already astir. Horses in the stables were whinnying and stamping for their feeds, the shooting dogs raced around their enclosure and peered through the bars at the hounds, two mares with foals at foot were being led



out through the archway to pasture. All was unreal and magically lovely in the clarity of the morning.

The huntsman sounded his horn again and moved towards the gate, the pack at his heels and Christopher and the two yeomen chiding the stragglers. As they passed under her window Christopher glanced up and saw Venetia. He waved.

‘Where are you going?’ she called down.

‘To exercise, out through the warren and up over.’

‘I wish I could come too.’

‘Why not, another time? We go most days. I hear your horses are being dressed for a ride—*Fury*, leave it, sirrah! Back, ba-ack!’

They went out under the archway and Venetia clambered back into her bed. Her place was still warm; she hugged herself and burrowed into the feathers. He had seemed quite different this morning, Christopher. The whole world seemed different. She thought of them walking out through the warren, the dew swishing at their boots, and “up over” on to the hill in the glorious sunlight. He had said the horses were being prepared for a ride. That was good. She would ride, and ride, and ride—

‘Wake up, sweet chick. It is gone seven.’

Nurse was in the room, drawing curtains, tidying, being her own, dear, tiresome self. After her came Patience. Seeing them both around her, and her own familiar bed and hangings and mirror, it was difficult to realize that the Strand was more than two hundred miles away.

‘I am riding this morning, Nurse.’

‘Are you now, dear love! Who put that idea into your head? That young cock-a-hoop Master Erisey, I’ll be bound!’

‘Didn’t you like Mr. Erisey, Nurse dearest?’

‘I know his sort, all bold eyes and soft words, and Lord

knows what mischief plotting at the back of it all. If you was three years older I'd not send you riding with him, young mistress! And what do *you* want?'

This unpromising welcome was addressed to some one who had knocked at the door and now stood on the threshold.

'A message from my lady Merryn to Mistress Mortimer,' said a broad comfortable voice, and a woman as broad and comfortable as her voice came billowing in. Nurse ruffled like an angry hen guarding her chickens, and her presentation was brief:

'Joanna, Mistress Venetia. Treherne's nurse.'

'Mistress Merryn sends you an invitation to breakfast with her in her room.'

'Thank you, Joanna. I will be with her directly. Were you her nurse once?'

'Nay, mistress, Master Peter's, who wedded her—a lovely baby. And to all the family—Sir John and the rest of his brothers, and to Master Christopher, Trevennor and Peter, and to Mistress Thomasine and Baby Frances.'

'That ain't uncommon with us,' said Venetia's nurse stonily. 'Very well, now, Joanna, I must get my lady ready.'

The two nurses, one fat and one thin, glared at each other. Joanna rolled out, having the disadvantage of standing on enemy territory. Venetia exchanged meaning glances with Patience.

She was soon ready, dressed in her green riding habit with a feather in her cap, and found her way through four intervening rooms to Merryn's bed-chamber. As she came to the other side of the house, Venetia realized that the wind was still blowing. Her room faced south and was sheltered. She wondered if there was always a wind on the hill.

Merryn was sitting at a table by the window. She wore a soft grey morning dress and looked astonishingly young to be a widow of four years' standing. There was a tray of breakfast before her and a chair set opposite for Venetia. A great pot of red and yellow wallflowers stood on the table between them, with velvety petals and a wonderfully sweet smell.

'Did you sleep well, Venetia?'

'Yes, madam,' said Venetia, hugging to herself the recollection of her horn interlude while the house still slept.

'Please call me Merryn, Venetia, among ourselves. The children called me that when I was still at my lessons, and they in the nursery. It may be unusual, but I like it. I thought you would rather sup quietly upstairs last night.'

'Yes, thank you—Merryn.'

'I suppose you were hostess in your father's house?'

'Well, sometimes.' She fell silent again, remembering that supper-party, the candlelight, the silver, the talk of Manoa and Cathay.

'I met your father when I was in London not so long ago.'

'Oh!' said Venetia, 'you know him then. I wish he were here. They shut him up, you know, in the Marshalsea.'

'I know. Were you there when he was taken?'

And suddenly Venetia found herself telling the whole story. It was odd to be talking like this to a stranger, but it was almost a relief. It had all been sealed up in her mind for so long. She told of her birthday supper, and of how she had sung Sir Philip Sidney's song, and of the talk between Mr. Cavendish and Mr. Raleigh and her father, before she and Perry had fallen asleep. Every detail still lived, the inflection of their voices, and Mr. Raleigh's ruby

rings, the silver pepper-box, and the way the moths had come in from the garden to the candles. Then, afterwards, those three men in the hall, Barney the doorman stupidly holding the light, and the portrait of her mother by Veronese on the stairs, looking down. The only thing she did not speak of was the day on the Thames. That was between her and Perry and her father alone.

Merryn sat looking out of the window towards the sea, very still, but Venetia knew she was listening. When the story was done there was a little pause, filled with the sound of the wind outside.

‘So that was the manner of it,’ said Merryn.

She turned back from the window and once again Venetia was struck by the living blue of her eyes. ‘You have thought of it all a great deal, have you not, Venetia?’

‘I suppose anyone would.’

‘Yes, I suppose anyone would. . . . A little more cider, Venetia, and some new bread? Do you not like our cream?’

‘It is wonderful cream. Is that how you eat it, on the buns?’

‘More of it, much more. Spread it thick, and the strawberry jam on top. We thought you might like a ride this morning? Trevennor says he will take you along the cliffs if you care to.’

‘Oh please,’ said Venetia, divided between good manners, not speaking with her mouth full, and a passionate desire to take another bite of strawberry jam and cream. Good manners won. ‘I have never seen the sea from close to,’ she added.

‘To-morrow you will have to begin lessons, but I think your first day should be a holiday. Lady Treherne will be talking to you about the lessons. She thinks it will be best if you share the schoolroom with the others, Thomasine, Trevennor (Venn, as we call him) and Peter



work with Mr. Brent, also Henry Trevanion, Sir John's page, when he is here. No doubt your schoolmaster and Mr. Brent will be able to work it all in.'

Venetia hoped, but was too shy to express it, that Master Ferrars and Sosthenes Brent would get along more promisingly than Nurse and Joanna.

'Do you like music?' Merryn asked.

'I love singing and can play the lute, and the virginals a little.'

'Mr. Erisey will be glad of it. He takes the music lesson because he is far the most musical among us. I am told he is a relentless master, but I note that every one seems to enjoy that hour.'

Venetia, too, thought she would enjoy music with Mr. Erisey.

At this point a boy came in. He was much smaller than Christopher, the features not unlike but less regular, his colouring black and swarthy with snapping eyes—a true Cornishman.

'Venn, here is Venetia,' said Merryn. 'This is Christo's brother Trevennor. Venn, you are taking Venetia and her brother for a ride, I think.'

'Yes,' said Venn. 'He is downstairs already.'

'Enjoy yourselves. And Venn, don't take them over rough going. Remember neither they nor their horses are used to it.'

'Aye, Madame Merryn,' said Trevennor with a bold look.

'Oh—' said Venetia, suddenly remembering, 'am I not to wait upon you sometimes—Merryn?'

'Yes, on occasions,' said Merryn. 'I have another gentlewoman, Mistress Chamond, and your duties will not be onerous. Come here before supper this evening and see how it is done.'



'When Merryn wants to show county worthies what state she keeps she'll have the two of you on at once,' remarked Venn as a parting shot from the door.

'You must be not exactly to *ask* for work,' he said indignantly to Venetia when they were in the corridor.

'Not exactly what?'

'Just not exactly—crazed, out of your wits! How old are you?'

'Eleven.'

'That's strange. So am I.' Trevennor seemed struck by the coincidence. 'Eleven and how much?'

'Three weeks.'

'I am eleven and three months.'

They looked at one another. Venn spoke fast and Venetia could not always follow his soft western speech.

'Are you dressed for riding?' he asked abruptly.

'Yes—why?'

'You can't ride on the cliffs in that! Don't you ride crosswise?'

'I can. Why?'

'Tisna safe going down these hills in a skirt. Look, I will get them to shift your saddle and you put on your breeches, quick. Truth, I mean it! All girls ride crosswise down here.'

Venetia felt herself flushing angrily. She disliked being ordered about by people who were less than two and a quarter months older than herself. But after a moment's consideration she decided that Trevennor might know his own country best, and she had better follow his advice. So she went to her room and put on her old velveteen breeches and a plain little grey jerkin with a ruff. Now she looked more like a waspish, red-haired page than a lady of consequence.

She found her way down the wide staircase and into

the great hall. It was a noble room with two fireplaces and a minstrel's gallery and great oriel windows looking out on to the gardens. Deers' antlers hung on the walls. The sun poured in on the rush-covered floor and a great black hound uncurled leisurely from the hearth and came over to her, sniffing suspiciously.

'He won't hurt you,' said a strange voice, and a tall stately man, with hair turning grey, came in from one of the side doors. 'You must be Mistress Mortimer. Are you looking for something?'

Venetia at once felt self-conscious and unladylike in her breeches.

'I am looking for the way into the yard. Are you Sir John Treherne?'

The tall man laughed pleasantly.

'No, I am Rowland Mundy, Steward and Comptroller to Sir John. I will call a servant to take you out. You should have your horse brought round to the porch—Master Trevennor's arrangement, I suppose! Damerel, be pleased to take Mistress Mortimer to the stable-yard.'

He bowed with grave civility to Venetia, took up a sheaf of papers from the table, and walked out of another door. Venetia thought Mr. Rowland Mundy kind, courteous and a trifle overwhelming. "Pendellion is a house always full of people, coming and going, each one of us absorbed in our own affairs"—how true those words were. And Venetia had an uneasy conviction that she had not yet met the half of the people.

She followed Damerel and the black hound followed her.

Trevennor and Perry were waiting impatiently by the stables and a groom immediately led *Grey Mortimer* to the mounting-block.

'I met Mr. Mundy,' she remarked, as if that were an excuse for her delay.



'YOU MUST BE MISTRESS MORTIMER. ARE YOU LOOKING FOR SOMETHING?'



'What did his Mightiness say?' asked Trevennor.

'He said I should have my horse brought to the front door.'

'He *would*.'

'He was most pleasant.'

'He always is.'

Venetia settled into the saddle. She was really more comfortable astride (though she would never admit it to Trevennor) and her father's Master of Horse had had great pains persuading her to take to a side-saddle. They clattered out under the archway, the black hound running in front, and turned around the house towards the sea. There was no sign of Christopher or the hounds: that whole morning scene in the yard was like a dream.

'I have a room in the turret,' Perry burst out, 'just under Christo and Venn's. It looks towards the sea.'

'They mostly do,' said Venn.

'Mine looks into the yard,' said Venetia firmly. 'I saw the hounds go out exercising this morning early. The huntsman blew his horn to them.'

'He always does that, he says it cheers them. They are fallow-hounds for hunting the hart. Father thinks the world of them.'

'I share my room with Henry Trevanion', said Perry. 'He is Sir John's page and has to get up before me.'

'Do you like *Just*?' asked Venn, pointing to the big black hound. 'He is mine, a St. Hubert hound, French bred. Father bought him over to Penzance. He's slow for hunting but harbours well and has a beautiful cry.'

Venetia said she liked him well.

They were now above the house. The way they had come yesterday it had seemed that Pendellion stood on a summit, but now she could see that it was cunningly built on a shoulder of land over the crest of the hill. Looking

eastward, it commanded the valley, St. Ruan and the woods, and looking west, the mouth of the valley and the sea. It was a bigger house than Venetia had thought, with its stables and barns massed around it. The west front facing the valley, where the porch was, was a modern mansion with tall windows, built to dwell in, but seawards Pendellion was gaunt as a fortress, slashed with buttresses, guarded by towers and a high wall and a moat.'

When they reached the top of the hill they could look down into the courtyard, and the stable-yard beyond, and to their left the whole of central Cornwall was spread out to the moors. The wind was blowing in from the sea, but not with the force of yesterday.

'I watched you arriving from up here,' said Trevennor.

'Your mother wondered where you were.'

'It always seems foolish hanging about greeting strangers, don't you think?' He smiled sideways at her, confidently.

'Just a question of good manners, I suppose.'

'That's like my sister Thomasine. Don't be like Thomasine, Venetia. Because we will do well together—if you don't get like Thomasine. She's almost one of them already. Merryn now, and Michael Erisey, are still one of Us.'

They were riding across the fields towards the coast. There were sheep all round them, staring and crying plaintively, and some clumsy-legged lambs.

'Why is Michael Erisey one of Us, as you call it?'

'Oh—well—he's a great fellow, Michael. Not a penny to his name, you know. He lost most of what he had in a ship that sunk and the rest of it in some plantation in Ireland. That's why he works for father now. He was a marvellous fine Lord of Misrule last Christmas.'

'He is fond of music, isn't he?'



'Oh yes, plays anything. Dances too. He holds the record for the longest dance over to Padstow. He kept at it four hours without a break on May-day last and stayed inside the hobby hoss itself for over an hour. Mostly uphill, too. Old Lettice Bassett was moved for once in her life to open her mouth. She said she thought hobby hoss dancing unbecoming to a gentleman in his position. Michael said that it was an unbecoming position in the hobby hoss anyway. He does those kind of things.'

Trevennor broke off, humming a catchy little tune, to lead the way over a scrambly dip in a bank. *Grey Mortimer* plunged after him, rather at a loss as to where to place his feet. Perry looked a little frightened but followed with clenched teeth.

'It's a well-known matter,' added Venn, 'that he's in love with Merryn.'

'Who is—Mr. Erisey?'

'Yes—among others. A lot of people want to marry our Merryn. It must be for her face and not her fortune, because that's all gone west on the law-suit. I thought I even caught Rowland Mundy making sheep's eyes at her once, until I saw he was admiring an Italian vase on the table behind her.'

He was entertaining, Venn, in his emphatic monkeyish way. Like an outlaw, loving life and mocking at it. Only he was too sure of himself.

'Look, Venetia!' said Perry, who had not managed to fit a word in edgeways. 'The sea!'

It lay before them like a pavement, only a pavement that moved and glittered, crossed by changing lights and the channels of the tides. Gulls mewed among the rocks, and from where they stood high on the cliff they caught the slow swing and roar of the Atlantic.

'This is Barbary Cliff,' said Venn. 'They call that rock down under "The Scar". It's a wicked old place for shipwrecks.'

'I suppose America lies across there!' murmured Perry, his eyes lost in Lord knows what dream of ships and seafarers. 'I want to make my living by piracy on the high seas.'

'Piracy!' said Venn severely. 'We don't call it piracy. We are all enemies of the King of Spain down here. Privateering, if you like——'

'What's the difference?'

'Ye Gods! All the difference in the world! Come on—let's go down here.'

He turned his cob to a descent which looked as steep as the side of a house. The turf on top of the cliff was cropped smooth by the sheep, but the slope was rough, tangled with stunted furze and tufts of coarse grass and stones.

'Grr on, *Roister*,' Venn admonished, with a whack of his stick. The cob pricked his wise ears and started down bravely, sitting on his hocks and slithering in a small landslide of earth and stones. The black hound lolloped happily ahead of him, smelling out conies.

Perry looked at Venetia, pale and defiant.

'I am not going down there,' he said stubbornly.

'We can go back along the top and take that track to the right,' said Venetia, a little sick at heart and furious with Trevennor. Perry immediately started off at a trot back along the ridge. Venetia hesitated.

'What's wrong with you?' called Venn from below. 'Do they breed you cowardly up in London?'

'Smouldering fiends!' shouted Venetia, shaking with fear and rage. 'I am coming. Meet you at the bottom, Perry!' Alive or dead, she would meet him at the bottom.

Without waiting to hear if the words had even reached her brother, she drove in her heels, and *Grey Mortimer*, startled and snorting, plunged over the edge.

It was like a nightmare, that descent. She had the terrible sensation of earth falling beneath them, her horse's grey neck far below her and his hind legs slithering and scrambling for a foothold, the rear cantle of the saddle biting into the small of her back. A dizzy glimpse of the stream below—Venn's voice shouting 'Keep him straight! Keep his head straight!'—the crawling surf on the rocks, wheeling gulls, the thunder of the tide. 'Oh God!' muttered Venetia, and again, 'Please God!' But she kept her horse's head straight. While the sea and slopes rocked around her, she remembered that.

And all at once she was down. *Grey Mortimer* checked himself, sweating and shaken, then reached for his head and snatched at a tuft of grass. Venetia felt sick and her head swam.

Trevennor rode up to her, his face chalk white.

'You took that mighty fast,' he said. 'Lord, you held him to it well. I thought at one moment——'

He stopped and bit his lip hard. Venetia stared back at him.

'Sorry.'

'It's all right, Venn.'

'Odd you being called Venetia. Have you realized—you could be Venn too?' His spirits revived at this and he seemed pleased. 'Let's look for your brother.'

They were in a dip between the cliffs, where a little stream wandered down through sedgy pools and kingcups to drop into the sea.

'Barbary Gutter,' said Venn. 'One of our places. *They* never come here. Nobody comes here, except Christo and Michael sometimes to shoot conies, and us riding. A



SHE KEPT HER HORSE'S HEAD STRAIGHT



sheep died once down here. You should have seen it. It swelled up and stank.'

Venetia, still shaken, was thankful she had not seen it.

They rode back, inland, keeping along the stream. The sound of the sea faded and soon they exchanged the short cliff turf for stunted bushes of gorse—gorse in full bloom, with a warm, nutty smell, like almonds.

'Do you ever read *Le Morte d'Arthur*?' Venetia asked shyly.

Venn was riding just behind, along a winding path made by the busy little feet of vermin.

'Don't read anything if I can help it! We know it all well enough, though. Peter, Merryn's husband, used to tell us splendid stories about King Arthur when we were small. We used to have the fires lit in the gallery and sit there in the winter, and he would amuse us all evening.'

'I think this place is like one of those springs of water, where a knight used to lie down and sleep—you remember, his horse cropping the grass and his shield hung on a tree. Only it would have to be a bush here.'

'But this is Arthur's country,' said Venn. 'There is a cave at Tintagel called after Merlin, and they say the King was killed at Camelford. We used to have a game not so long ago'—he was watching Venetia to make sure she was not laughing at him, 'Christo was Sir Launcelot and I was Tristram. We used to play it when we were practising with our lances in the yard.'

They rode on in a sympathetic silence. At last Venn said:

'When you find your brother, I must get back to Sosthenes—curses on his addled head! You may as well go on. You can keep along the stream until you strike the St. Ruan track, and so back through the woods up the hill, the way you came yesterday. It won't take you more than half an hour.'



'What time is dinner?'

'About eleven. It must be half-past nine now.'

They met Peregrine in the lane, at a loss which way to turn.

'There you are, Venetia! Why didn't you follow me? I looked round and I was alone.'

'Oh Perry, I *am* sorry. I went down after Venn.'

'Was it very steep?'

Venetia and Venn looked at each other.

'Not bad,' lied Venetia. 'Still, we may as well not tell them at Pendellion that we went that way.'

Trevennor looked very relieved.

'Why not?' asked Perry.

'Well, you see it's a rather secret sort of place down there. We don't want every one to find it. You must come and see it for yourself.'

'Both of us eleven and both of us Venns,' murmured Trevennor, marvelling. 'That must mean something. It's Fate.'

They looked at each other again, and knew that in this one morning something had happened. Venetia Mortimer and Trevennor Treherne would be loyal to one another always.

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## Chapter 7

### THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS

WHEN Trevennor left them, Venetia and Perry rode on up the main valley as he had suggested. There was a road running beside the stream, and the floor of the coombe, the width of one small meadow, was brilliant with buttercups. Cattle and oxen grazed here, raising their heads to give them both a stupid and sinister stare as they rode past. The morning had clouded over but it was sheltered between the slopes.

'I wish I had gone down that hill,' said Perry unhappily.

'Oh, I don't know. It wasn't much fun and there was no need.'

'*Flax* could have done it if *Grey Mortimer* did.'

They rode on, the bare slopes of the mouth changing to trees.

'Did Trevennor say anything to you—about me not going down, I mean?'

'No, it was none of his business anyhow.'

'I don't think I'll make much of a privateer after all.'

'Perry, please forget about it. I hated that hill, I was scared out of my wits, and I never want to ride down it again. That's the truth, and please keep it to yourself.'

This passionate outcry seemed to make Perry feel better.

Still following Venn's instructions, they left the stream and climbed up into the woods. Soon they struck off the avenue to Pendellion.

'It must be still quite early,' said Venetia. 'Shall we go the other way towards St. Ruan, and take that track that

branched off beyond the gate? I noticed it as we came along yesterday.'

'Oh, do let us!'

They were both revelling in their freedom. In London they had never ridden unaccompanied. If it were not their father or a Gentleman Usher, they always had the Master of Horse, or Master Ferrars or several grooms at their heels. Here they were alone. The children all seemed to ride wherever they chose and nobody worried, and they could wear old clothes and get sunburned. Mrs. Fane would have disapproved strongly, but their father—Venetia thought that perhaps their father had not altogether held the same views as Mrs. Fane. Could that have been why she had not come with them to Pendellion?

'This is rather a boggy wood,' remarked Perry.

It was so still. The birds had fallen silent when the sun went in. Only the little streams, seeping down through last year's leaves in a chain of waterfalls, filled the woods with their voices. The children came round a corner upon an old woman gathering sticks for firewood. She dropped a curtsy to them and quavered a greeting but they rode hurriedly past her, smelling witchcraft.

If Venn had come on with them, how different it would have been! He was so fearless. And yet, in another way, Venetia was glad that she and Perry were alone together, explorers in a strange land. Again she had that *Morte d'Arthur* feeling, that they were knights riding deep into the forest. Soon they might come upon a castle among the trees, with turrets and a moat with swans upon it. Perhaps an enchanted castle. There was a wicked woman called Morgan-le-Fey who was always putting magic upon castles.

'Here is the gateway,' said Perry. 'Where is your track?'

'Through it and turn to the left. The other goes to St. Ruan.'

They passed through the gate in the wall that surrounded the estate and took a smaller path through the woods downhill. They came out on to a slope where there was a mist of wild hyacinths under the trees, of the most vivid unearthly blue. The path wound on downwards. Their horses' bits jingled and the saddles creaked in the great stillness.

'There's a clearing ahead,' whispered Perry.

Suddenly they came out into the open. They were once more on the floor of the valley, where the stream made a clearing in the steep woods. Before them in the long grass, grey and grave and lovely, stood a house.

It was a long low house, perhaps fifty years old, smaller and neater than Pendellion and somehow more gracious. There were tall windows and a turreted parapet; a forest of ornate chimneys rose against the trees behind. At the corner nearest to them there was a small octagonal tower, which made it look like the enchanted castle of Venetia's romance.

'Perry, do you remember the knights who rode several days into the forest and came to a castle——?'

'The castle of Joyous Gard,' Perry chanted.

'Joyous Gard! Sir Launcelot's own house where he lived, where he and Tristram stayed. Oh Perry, let's call this Joyous Gard.'

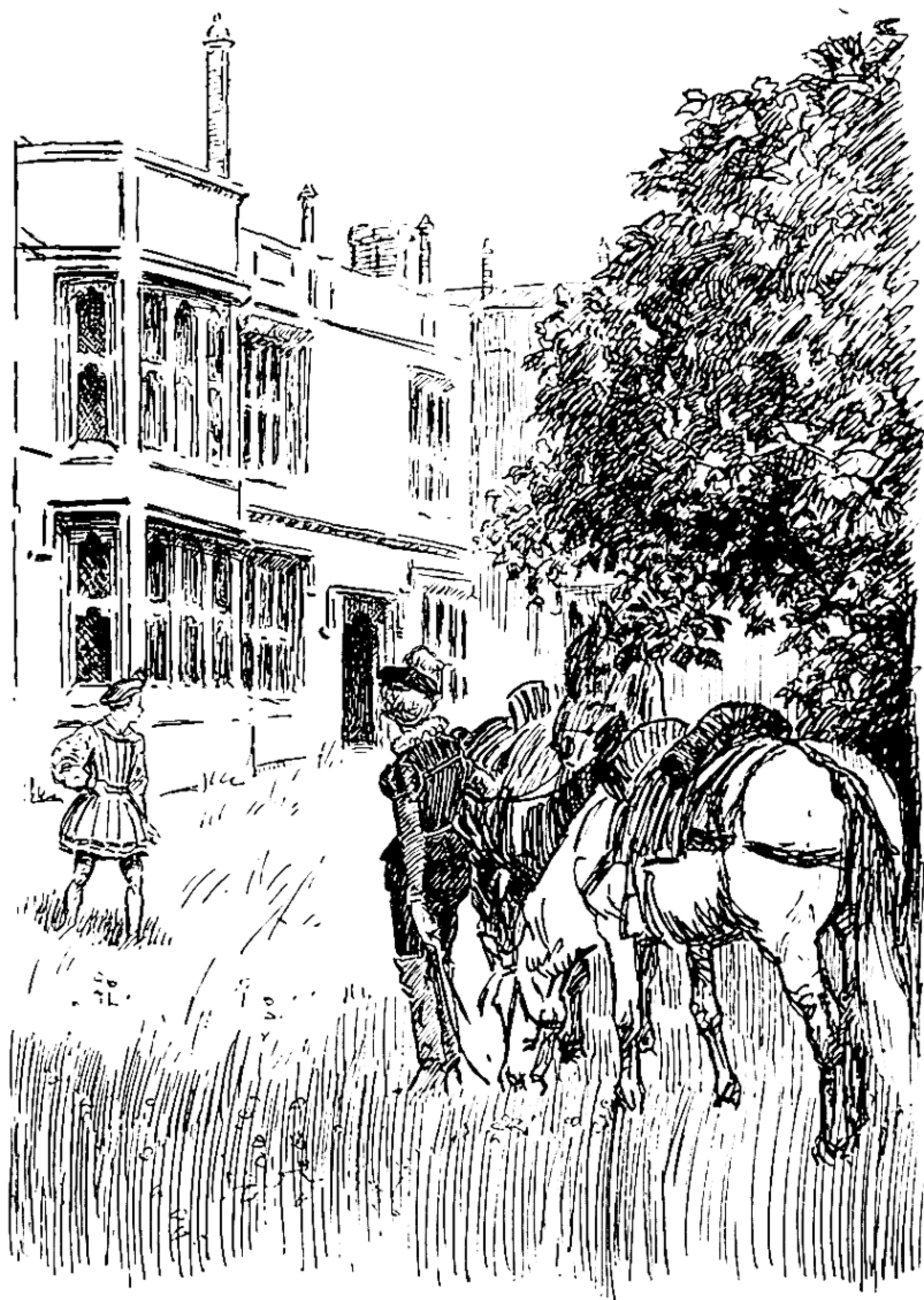
'It isn't *quite* a castle. Do you think that matters?'

'If you look at it from this side it's very like one. Besides, it may have an enchantment on it.'

'Very well, then—Joyous Gard. But maybe it has another name——'

'Of course it has—who cares! It looks empty. The chimneys have no smoke and nobody's cut the long grass.'





‘IT IS EMPTY,’ HE SAID. ‘I WALKED ALL ROUND IT  
AND FOUND NO ONE.’



'And the windows are shuttered,' said Perry, 'all except those two big ones. Shall I go and explore?'

'Very well, and I will hold *Flax*. But don't be caught by anyone.'

Perry dismounted and waded off through the rich meadow grass, while Venetia stood between the horses at the edge of the trees and let them graze. She watched Perry's sturdy back till it disappeared round the edge of the turret. Then she stared at the house, and the more she saw of it, the more she liked it. Joyous Gard! The name suited it well. It looked happy.

While she stood there the sun came out, transforming everything. The buttercups caught the light and held it, and all the trees around flushed greeny-silver and greeny-gold. The air was warm, smelling of grass and wild hyacinths and the wet soft sea-smell.

At last Perry came back through the long grasses, his eyes bright and adventurous.

'It is empty,' he said. 'I walked all round it and found no one. The windows are barred except for those two we can see and I looked in. It's a passing big room and very dusty.'

'I must see! You keep watch, Perry.'

Venetia gave him the reins and ran across the meadow, between the buttercups and meadow-sweet. The long grass came right up to the house. When she came to the tower she looked up and saw an oriel window jutting out above; that must be a pleasant room, looking out over the tree-tops towards the sea.

She crept round close to the wall, and the stone was warm to her hand. A lead drain-pipe running down from the roof was carved with two cherubs' heads and the date '1577'—six years ago—but that was nothing to go by. The house seemed much older. Still it could not have been

deserted for very long. She came to the tall windows Perry had spoken of and stared in. For some seconds she was too dazzled to distinguish anything, then she made out furniture, some heavy chairs and a table. She went round to one of the side panes to see if the light were better from there, and as she pressed her nose against the glass, it suddenly moved. Excited, Venetia put her fingers into the crack of the frame and the window slid open towards her. The latch was undone!

For a second she was overwhelmed at her success. Then she pulled herself up on to the sill and scrambled in, thankful for her breeches, dropping softly on to a wooden floor.

She was in a fine chamber, panelled with light oak, with a high ceiling criss-crossed by massive beams. The two great windows facing the meadow took up most of one side, the glass higher up set with coats of arms. Opposite was a fireplace with a stone mantel carved with a crest—a winged stag. The motto below it was just one word—‘LOYALTY’.

The room was sparsely furnished. There was a round walnut table, two oak chairs, several stools and, on a press at the far end, a silver flagon, such as used for pouring wine.

It was curious to see the flagon in a bare empty room and she went over to look at it. There were some dregs of wine left at the bottom and finger-marks on the silver as if it was lifted at intervals by none-too-clean hands.

There were no covers nor carpets; the sun coming through the coats of arms fell in pools of gold, azure and scarlet on the bare boards. It all smelt disused and fusty, an atmosphere compounded of wood, dust and stale air, and the silence was the heavy deathly hush of an empty house.

But for all the hush and the strangeness, Venetia did not feel afraid. It was a kindly house, her Joyous Gard. She thought of flowers in that room, primroses, marigolds and gillyflowers, crimson damask on the table, a tapestry on the wall. She could almost hear footsteps ringing in the passage, a shout of laughter, armour clanking. Then they would come in, the mighty men of valour—Launcelot, tall and resplendent, peerless of courtesy and of knighthood, with eyes that knew both good and evil; Tristram of Lyonesse, beloved of the fellowship, who hunted and played the harp and was knight to la Belle Isold; and Galahad, knight of the Sangreal, like a young Archangel. . . .

Venetia came out of her day-dream to realize she must go. She took one last look round, at the winged stag over the fireplace and its proud motto, at the coloured pattern of sunlight on the floor. She clambered back through the window and closed it gently.

Outside it was hot and sweet, the air full of humming insects. She hurried back to the tower at the corner and so across the meadow to the horses.

‘You have been away an age,’ said Perry. ‘I wondered what had become of you! I saw a man come round the far end of the house but he went back again. He looked like a gardener.’

‘I am glad he didn’t see me,’ said Venetia, and told Perry about her exploration. ‘I suppose the man was some caretaker.’

‘Do you think,’ said Perry, ‘we could come to Joyous Gard often? It must be quite near Pendellion.’

‘Pendellion!’ shrieked Venetia. ‘Dinner! Eleven o’clock. Perry, we are hopelessly late!’

But even then she looked back over her shoulder and said,

'Good-bye, Joyous Gard. We'll see you again very soon.'

They went back through the woods at a hard gallop. That was exciting, too, scurrying along over bog-holes and little streams, and under branches, with chequered sunlight dappling *Grey Mortimer's* neck and Perry shouting 'Whoop, Whoop!' behind. They went up the hill out of the trees like a couple of furies, coming over the brow into the wind, and all the dogs started barking and the hoofs clattered under the archway of the stable-yard. They yelled for the grooms and flung the reins at the first who came, then rushed breathless along the passage towards the hall. Just inside the door they met Michael Erisey, booted and spurred.

'Where the devil have you two been!' he exploded. 'Sir John's inquiring for you and the whole house in an uproar. I was just going out to organize a searching party. The third course is already in.'

Indeed, the sounds and smells of dinner floated over the screen which partitioned off the hall, and their conversation was interrupted by the passing to and fro of yeomen and scullions with steaming dishes. Venetia and Perry quailed before the blast of Mr. Erisey's wrath.

'We were in the woods,' said Venetia, very small and feminine. 'Shall we go in now or tidy upstairs?'

'Go in to dinner breeched like a boy! Do you take us for barbarians! Upstairs with the pair of you without ado, and thank your watching stars that this is your first day at Pendellion!'

So they made their first entry into dinner at the same time as the pudding. Venetia felt she would never forget it. Rows and rows of faces turned towards them, the whole of the household at two trestle tables down the length of the hall and the family dining on the dais at the



top. There must have been about a hundred people there, all told. She and Perry tramped along the top of the room, crimson with embarrassment and exertion, past Lady Treherne's shocked face, past Trevennor's lifted eyebrow, to where the master of Pendellion sat in state, and in the hush that had fallen Venetia heard her own voice, very clear and quiet:

'My brother and I offer our humble apology, sir, for our unpunctuality.'

'Ho indeed!' shouted Sir John Treherne. 'The young Mortimer is it! What were you about, child?'

'We lost our way in the woods, sir.'

'The babes in the wood again, what, ha, ha! Get you to your trenchers then, and if you do it again I'll put my secretary at you and you won't sit down for a week!'

Venetia looked up and smiled at Sir John. She liked his black eyes and his square black beard, and even his great bull's voice was not unkind. A hundred pairs of eyes turned back to their food, the clatter of knives and spoons broke out again and the fiddler took up his tune in the gallery. Venetia slipped into her seat beside young Peter, and Trevennor, opposite, gave her a knowing grin, while Mistress Bassett at his side stared and stared and said nothing.

That evening Venetia went up to help Merryn prepare for supper. Mistress Chamond, a thin lady of some thirty years of age, unmarried, was the other gentlewoman.

Merryn had some beautiful dresses, one blue, worked all over with silver dolphins and sea horses, and another with the pattern of a knot garden in coloured silks, but she seemed to favour dark colours and simple fashions. Venetia followed Mistress Chamond around rather helplessly, noting where she found the various items.

On her fifth or sixth journey back from the locker, she



noticed a portrait above the fireplace, of a young man with his hand resting on his sword. He was of a dark complexion with bold, brilliant eyes.

'That was my husband, Peter,' said Merryn. 'He died of wounds at sea on Sir Humphrey Gilbert's last voyage of discovery.' His name might be Peter, but it was not young Peter who resembled him.

'He is very like Trevennor, madame.'

'So you have noticed that already? Yes, Venn is growing up in his very image. Though I fear he will never come to my Peter's sweet balance of mind. He is made to beat a stormier course.'

Venetia stood by the dressing-table, looking down on the smooth curve of Merryn's cheek as Mistress Chamond coiled her hair. There were several silver-sided combs laid out ready for use and Venetia suddenly started. The crest on the sides of the combs was a winged stag.

## Chapter 8

### HUNTING ON THE HILL

VENETIA and Thomasine were on the way to their music lesson, on the third day after the Mortimers' arrival, when they heard Trevennor coming across the great hall:

'I cannot eat but little meat  
My stomach is not good,  
But sure I think that I can drink [Hello Venetia],  
With him that wears a hood.'

'Venn, be *quiet*!' said Thomasine. He was singing at the top of his voice and the servants clearing the dinner-tables were grinning from ear to ear.

'Back and side, go bare, go bare,  
Both foot and hand go cold.  
But belly, God send thee good ale enough,  
Whether it be new or old.'

'You must leave off those tavern songs,' said poor Thomasine, who had reached the self-conscious age of thirteen.

'Foh! That's nothing. Here's another—

Roister Doister is my name,  
Roister Doister——'

'Please, Master Trevennor,' said one of the yeomen coming up, 'Master Mundy offers his respects and asks you to finish your song in the garden, seeing the house has not space for the two of you this afternoon.'

'I am practising for my music lesson,' said Trevennor, 'but let it pass! Have you heard, Venetia, we're hunting to-morrow! Do you hunt?'

'I have been out,' said Venetia. 'Once Father took me to Waltham Cross and the Queen was hunting in the Forest. All the lords were in green and gold, and the Maids of Honour in white satin, and the Queen stood on a platform and drew at the harts as they galloped past.'

'Driven deer!' said Trevennor with withering scorn, 'we hunt the hart at force down here. Father says people who shoot at driven beasts are only fit to be shot themselves.'

'Tell that to her Majesty!' retorted Venetia with asperity.

'We must hurry,' urged Thomasine; 'Mr. Erisey is awaiting us.'

He was in the little music-room that overlooked the bowling lawn. It was a room that held the afternoon sun and, as everywhere at Pendellion, there were big vases of flowers about, wall-flowers and some of the rare white lilac. Michael Erisey sat by the window plucking absently at the strings of a lute and humming to himself. He looked up and said quickly:

'Not you, Venn! It is too much. Come back in twenty minutes' time and I'll take you with Peter and Peregrine.'

'But I must come along with Venetia, Michael. We hunt in couples.'

'No matter how you hunt, this is singing. Be off!'

'Then I'll go and look at the falcons,' said Venn cheerfully, and marched out, leaving the door open. They heard him singing away through the house—

'Christian Custance have I found,  
Christian Custance have I found,  
A widow worth a thousand pound!  
I mun be married a Sunday.'

Thomasine turned eagerly to Mr. Erisey:

'I have learnt the song you set me by heart.'

'Good. Sing it then. And don't quaver.'

She sang, most meltingly, with her eyes fixed upon him, a doleful song about unrequited love.

Thomasine was of Christo's colouring, but of a more nondescript fairness, with large, round and rather vacant grey eyes. Venetia did not think much of her performance and neither, she fancied, did Michael Erisey. He whistled very softly between his teeth and fidgeted with what might be irritation.

Venetia looked out of the window on the exciting spectacle of Master Ferrars and Sosthenes Brent playing bowls. Sosthenes was a caricature of Master Ferrars, he was longer and thinner and shabbier and stooped more; it was very comic. She fell to thinking of Joyous Gard and wondering how soon she and Perry would be able to go back there. Now that lessons had begun, there seemed less time, except in the evenings, and to-morrow they were hunting. She wondered if they would find the window unfastened next time, and who could have been so careless as to leave it so, and what connexion there was between the winged stag of the fireplace and his counterpart on Merryn's combs.

'Venetia, if you cannot muster any real interest, please feign some at least!' said Michael Erisey, 'or is Sosthenes Brent so absorbing?'

'I am sorry, Mr. Erisey.' She was uncomfortably aware that he had already addressed several remarks to her. Thomasine was poring over a score.

'Will you sing to me? Anything you like.'

She sang the *Cherry Tree Carol*. It suited her mood; the lovely simple words were what Guinevere or Isold might have sung, and she needed no accompaniment.



‘Joseph was an old man,  
And an old man was he,  
When he wedded Mary  
In the land of Galilee.

Joseph and Mary walked  
Through an orchard good,  
Where was cherries and berries  
As red as any blood.’

When she had done Erisey made no comment, but he had not fidgeted nor whistled between his teeth while she was singing. She played a little piece on the lute for him, and then on the virginals. She was not so much at ease with the virginals and he noticed it at once and set her some scales to study.

A servant interrupted the lesson to say that Lady Treherne required Mistress Thomasine’s presence in the still-room, if her lesson was done and she could be spared. Mr. Erisey said rather too quickly that she *could* be spared, and Thomasine darted him a reproachful look and made a great bother over gathering up her belongings. As soon as she had gone, Michael threw himself on a chair, sighed, stretched out his legs and glanced at Venetia.

‘A plan has come to me,’ he said. ‘Would it be amusing to start our own orchestra? We all play the lute; Christo can deal with the horns and flute, Trevennor with the fiddles——’

‘Is Venn good?’

‘He can play when he applies himself and quits fooling. I will take on the viols and can sing a little, you play the cittern and sing, and we could ask Mrs. Merryn Treherne if she will sing with us and accompany on the virginals.’

‘It is a wonderful idea,’ said Venetia, catching his

enthusiasm, 'And we could sing in parts, too. What about Thomasine?'

'What about her? You wouldn't have her in it, would you? She sings like a scalded cat.'

'She'll be very hurt.'

'I know, it's the devil, but what's to do about it!' Michael frowned and drummed his nails on the window-sill. Venetia decided the chance was too good to miss.

'What was Merryn's name before she married, Mr. Erisey?'

Erisey looked disconcerted and began to pick the petals off the wall-flowers.

'She was a Killigrew, of a younger branch of the Arwennack family. Why?'

'I have been wondering. Did she come from hereabouts?'

'So I believe. She lived a part of her childhood, I heard, in Lynn, up the valley.'

'Lynn?' Venetia struggled to keep the excitement out of her voice.

'Yes, just this side of St. Ruan village, beyond our gates, down on the river. It was made over as part of her marriage portion and she lived on there with her husband before he went to sea.'

'Why is it—why does she not live there now?'

'I suppose it holds sad memories for her. She came to live at Pendellion when she returned from London last year. Then the law-suit had made inroads into her fortune and no doubt it seemed wasteful for the family to keep up two establishments so close together.' Michael Erisey looked sharply at Venetia. Four stalks of wall-flowers beside him were stripped bare. 'Are you satisfied?'

'Yes, thank you, it's very interesting. Was that the Bodrugan law-suit?'

‘Yes it was.’

‘Now that Bodrugan is dead will it make a difference?’

‘Mistress Mortimer, I am really not at liberty to discuss my master and Mrs. Treherne’s affairs any further.’

Venetia flushed and accepted the rebuke.

‘Shall we go out?’ said Michael Erisey more gently. ‘It is a sin to waste such an afternoon. Are you hunting to-morrow?——’

And he and Venetia went out talking. Trevennor met them in the hall. He had been coming along to his music lesson but, with a lightning adjustment of his plans, he turned back with them into the garden. Perry and Peter, arriving three minutes later, saw them all playing bowls on the lawn and they, too, immediately turned about and went ferreting in the warren.

After supper that evening the family went to sit in the long gallery, Sir John with them. But he was not allowed to rest for long. First, the chief huntsman, Menhenitt, was announced, and then the men in charge of the relays, and he went down to interview each one. Venn and Thomasine both wanted to ride the same horse and were quarrelling about it. Lady Treherne was discussing with Merryn the food for the hunt breakfast, Mistress Bassett and Mistress Chamond nodding wisely and saying nothing. Christo and Michael played chess, Peter was having a difficult time trying to draw a ghost, and Venetia sat by the window with *Le Morte d'Arthur*, reading fast because the sunset was fading.

They brought the lights just before Sir John came back, and his entry set all the little flames spluttering in the draught.

‘To-morrow’s plan is as follows,’ he boomed. ‘We are assembling in Trevarian woods, with relays up the valley

towards Allenbridge Highway. Menhenitt vows there is a hart lying up in the springs. You can go along to harbour him, Christopher, if you choose. Menhenitt leaves at daybreak.'

'Thank you, sir, I will. Will the whole pack be out?'

'All except the new hounds from Stratton. That *Fury* is going on with the relays. I am sending you, Thomasine, with your young friend, with the third relay and you start at half-past six. Jewell will be in charge.'

'Oh, father,' cried Venn. 'Can Venetia not come to the Assembly and follow the whole way? She has hunted before. She may not even see us if she hangs around with a relay.'

'You can see plenty,' said Thomasine; 'I had the best part of the hunt last time.'

'And you will be better together,' said Lady Treherne.

This was all a little above Venetia's head, but she gathered that Venn was fighting a lone battle for her, and losing. For fear of showing her ignorance, she kept silent.

'Since it has been arranged,' said Sir John, 'she had best go along of Thomasine. She can follow throughout another day if she is set on it.'

'The question has been settled, Trevennor dear,' said his mother, warding off further protest. 'What about cold brawn with the pasties? Or have we enough already?—'

'Five o'clock for you, Christopher, half-past six for the maidens, seven for the rest of the company,' cried Sir John. 'Hunting, Lettice?'

'Ah no, Sir John,' giggled Mistress Bassett, flattered.

'*Henry!*' bawled Sir John, 'HENRY!'

Henry Trevanion, a slight boy of some twelve years, jumped up.

'Go look to my boots and my hunting knife, sirrah—'



and *Henry* ! I parade with the militia on Friday. See to my armour.'

'Aye, aye, sir,' said Henry, hurrying out. It was no bed of roses being page to Sir John Treherne.

'Get you to bed, children, all of you—you too, Christopher. Mr. Erisey, may I have your advice below on the sale of the St. Blazey holdings?'

'At your service, sir,' murmured Erisey with an unhappy expression.

'How well dear John looks these days!' remarked Mistress Lettice Bassett as they went out, and it was so surprising to hear her put forward an opinion that everybody gaped.

Venetia obediently went to bed, still vague about her particular part in the hunting of the hart. She seemed to have just curled up and closed her eyes when Patience was shaking her and repeating, 'It's turned half-six, Mistress Venetia. You asked to be woke.'

'Ugh, yes, hunting! Is it fine?'

'There is a thick mist, but 'twill clear, they say.'

This morning Venetia missed the horn blast that called the hounds to exercise. But the yard was full of coming and going, men in hunt uniform mounting and riding away, and hounds coupled on leashes, and bloodhounds. It was exciting, and as she pulled on her velvet breeches and embroidered doublet (that Nurse had insisted was more lady-like than the jerkin) she felt her heart lying clammily at the pit of her stomach. Patience brought her some breakfast which she could barely swallow, and before she was ready she saw *Grey Mortimer* being led across the yard towards the front.

'My hat, Patience, quickly, the one with the hanging plume! Good morning, Nurse—my gloves, Patience, my whip. Yes, Nurse—good-bye.'

Venetia flung out and down into the great hall. There was a strange young man there with a long nose and a tiresome voice. 'Good morning. My name is Joliffe. Digory Joliffe. Could you tell me if Mistress Merryn is abroad yet, Mistress Thomasine?'

'I'm not Thomasine,' gasped Venetia, and shot out to the porch before he could detain her further.

Thomasine was there, already mounted, in a yellow hat which went ill with her hair and morning complexion. There was also Jewell, who had ridden to Allenbridge to meet them, a ruddy-faced dark young Cornishman. He wore a green hunting suit faced with the Treherne colours, pale blue and scarlet, with a horn slung about him and a convivial-looking flask at the pommel of his saddle. Two kennel-men, each with a couple of hounds on a leash, and one horse-boy made up the party.

They rode round the house and up over the hill. It was a grey, damp morning with thick mist in the valley and the sea all but invisible. Only the Scar Rock stood out behind them, black and clear, and sound carried well, because they could hear the long sigh of the tide.

They were quiet at first on that dawn ride. Only now and again the men chided the hounds, *Belman*, *Dainty*, *Talbot* and *Fury*. They saw a bustard; as they began to descend, leaving the wide view towards Bodmin, a fox crossed their path.

'Yon's a mothering vixen,' said Jewell, 'ole varmint.'

'Do you ever hunt foxes?' asked Venetia.

'Some do. Some hunt 'em with hounds and some with the greyhounds and terriers. We treat 'em as vermin hereabout and take 'em with nets and gins.'

'See what a bush she carries,' said another of the men. 'Her babes 'll be proper pretty. There'll be a-plenty of fat fowls laid out in her parlour.'

Thomasine, too, began to talk. There were some moments when Venetia saw a likeness to Christopher, in her manner of speaking and an occasional turn of phrase but as she had missed his true fairness of colouring, so she had missed his charm and courtesy. In fact, thought Venetia reluctantly, Thomasine was dull. Good, surely, and painstaking and virtuous, but even at five years old her sister Frances was more personable and the boys were altogether different.

They came to their appointed stand, a clearing at the edge of a wood close to the Allenbridge Highway, where hawthorn trees glimmered like ghosts among the green. It was marked by bent twigs, 'blemishes' Jewell called them. He had each man's position mapped out clearly in his mind and gave his instructions lucidly:

'You, Jan and Jason, stay here with hounds and don't loose them by any manner till I orders. And you too stay, Barnabas, till I call, an' if I hear chittering or laffin t'other side I'll have the stick to the lot of you.'

'Aye, Master Jewell,' they grinned.

'Mind you hold *Fury*, he's proper sharp on conies. Mistress Thomasine, you and your young lady come along o' me——'

He took them to the edge of the wood, whence they could look along the valley westwards. It was a coombe formed like the neighbouring vale of St. Ruan, woods in the shelter, bare skylines, rough slopes towards the mouth.

'How do the relays work out?' asked Venetia, determined to satisfy her curiosity at the risk of her sporting reputation.

'The Assembly is in the furthest patch of woodland towards the sea,' said Thomasine. 'They are harbouring the hart, I think, on the edge of Trevarian woods and hope to run him inland. The first two relays are laid down

in the bottom; we are the third. When the stag or the hart passes us by we unleash our hounds, and so the hunting pack gets refreshed by new hounds all along the way.'

Her explanation was so helpful that Venetia at once felt guilty for thinking her dull. She asked:

'What if the hart runs the other way?'

'He won't go up along, not to-day,' said Jewell. 'They've set a relay over against that hill, but he'll come this way.'

'One day,' said Thomasine, 'there was a strong wind blowing the scent and all turned out wrong. None of the relays came into the hunt at all.'

'Rare vex', Sir John was!' chuckled Jewell, his brown eyes dancing at the memory.

They waited. Birds were singing in the wood and they could hear the murmur of voices where the kennelmen talked together.

'I spoke with Michael Erisey this morning,' said Thomasine carelessly.

'He must have been early astir.'

'He was up with father until after three o'clock and said it was then foolish to go to bed, so he went for a walk on the cliffs instead. He said it was a splendid dawn but clouded over.'

'Does your father often work so late?'

'He has a lot of work. The estate, and the buying and selling of property, and this Star Chamber case dragging on, and training the levies, let alone the Assizes due and after that the Stannery Courts.'

'Why so much training of levies?'

Thomasine stared.

'Against invasion, of course. There's a scare on all along the coast.'



'There is!' said Jewell. 'Centon musters in St. Ruan come Friday.'

'I never heard tell of it in London——' began Venetia, but Jewell held up his hand for silence. The men were still murmuring in the clearing and he cursed them under his breath with some rich oaths that were new to Venetia. He shook his reins to stop his horse fidgeting. They all listened.

'They're comin'!' whispered Jewell hoarsely.

Venetia heard nothing at first. Then, thin and distant like an elf bugle, three short blasts of a horn. *Grey Mortimer* heard it, threw up his head and trembled. Other sounds came to them, the echo of a holloa, the clamour of hounds. There was a pause and the horn blew again.

'They're at a loss,' muttered Jewell. 'No, harkee, yon's the bloodhound giving tongue. He has it, he has it! They are in cry.'

Full, strong and barbaric up the valley came the hound music, hunting fast on a hot scent. Jewell swung round and cantered back to the clearing, Thomasine and Venetia following him.

'Stand by your hounds!' he muttered, 'don't let 'em loose yet.'

They waited, waited, and ever the sound increased. Suddenly there was a crashing in the undergrowth and a stag came leaping through the clearing, his head flung back to avoid the branches. He was young and graceful and beautiful.

'Shall we loose 'em, Master Jewell?'

'Hold! He's no hunted beast. Fresh as paint he is.'

Then Jewell stiffened and motioned with his hand. A great hart was crossing the open slope just above them. There was a flock of sheep in the next field and he

made straight towards them, loping away in powerful bounds.

'Stand ready!' cautioned Jewell, keeping his eyes on the hart. He raised his horn to his lips and blew four shivering blasts.

Everything seemed to happen at once. There was an answering call, the hounds came pouring across the slope, Jewell cried,

'To him, To him! That's he! Hike a *Fury*, hike, hike! To him.'

And *Fury*, *Belman*, *Dainty* and *Talbot* went racing out into the open.

'That's my boys, to him!' holloaed Jewell, exulting. *Belman* hit off the line and wheeled away with *Talbot* and *Fury* at his heels and the whole kennel after them, and behind again the horsemen thundering on to the slope.

'Are we right?' bellowed Sir John Treherne.

'Through the sheep, sir, and on. Going strongly.—Come on, all!' And Jewell put spurs to his horse. Venetia gave *Grey Mortimer* his head and joined in behind Sir John and Jewell. Hoofs were drumming up behind. They charged through a gateway and then they were among the sheep.

'Ewes, can't you see! Sheep, Joliffe, you thundering, lily-livered loon!' And Sir John let out a string of less-gentlemanly oaths at Digory Joliffe, who obviously had no control over his horse. The hounds checked and the bloodhounds were some way behind, but Jewell blew them on through the sheep, the way he had seen the hart go, and the other huntsmen rallied to him. They were forward again. Little pictures flashed in and out of Venetia's consciousness—huntsmen in green and blue and gold, Sir John with wine-coloured face, Merryn's

blue eyes blazing, and poor Mr. Joliffe, tugging desperately at his horse. And Venn—Venn riding like a little demon, delirious with excitement, screaming '*Whoop*, to him, that's he!'

They plunged down into the woods. The pace slowed as they all hustled blindly along the deep rides, through the bog holes, and the leaves brushed their faces. Then into an open meadow again, and some one calling:

'They've changed, sir, it's a fresh one and naught but a staggard.'

'Devil take that wood!' cried Sir John, 'bring them back.'

They called the hounds off, Michael Erisey circling to help the huntsmen with his cry of 'To him, boys, counter, counter!' But the hart had disappeared.

'Lying up in a lair in the bushes, said the chief huntsman, Menhenitt, and he and his companions dismounted and started to beat the undergrowth.

Venn came up to Venetia and flung himself off his steaming pony.

'It's a shame we changed,' said Venetia. 'What is a staggard?'

'A stag of four years old. I don't know about you, but we've had a fair hunt and hot as hades. We came a merry pace. Look at that ass, Joliffe, playing up to Merryn.'

'Is he a suitor too?'

'Yes, and a most persistent one. He lives close hereabout. Here comes Michael. Now the fat will fry!—Listen.'

'Ah, Mr. Erisey!' said Mr. Joliffe, 'I was just thinking I had not seen you as much to the fore, as they say, as is your wont.'

'No,' said Michael crossly, 'I was reviving a bloodhound that brute of yours kicked. If I were you, I would

ensure that my horse behaved in a civilized manner at least at one end.'

'Mistress Merryn, I must insist on your gracing my humble hearth this once. You can see the house from this very spot and you have promised so often.'

'Oh, Mr. Joliffe, I cannot——'

'Nonsense, Mrs. Merryn, I will not hear of a refusal!'

'Mr. Joliffe!' exclaimed Erisey. 'My apologies! we are trespassing on the fringe of your land. Last week,' he explained to Merryn, 'Venn and I came a-riding and were thrown off Mr. Joliffe's estate for trespass.'

'Most regrettable,' muttered Joliffe, 'but we have to warn people off because of the chance of fires—these woods, you know.'

'And was the yokel who lost his right hand last year for poaching your hares lighting a fire, Mr. Joliffe?'

There was an awkward pause. 'That touched him on the raw,' whispered Venn, delighted. Fortunately, before any more could be said, the horns sounded the *strake of nine*, calling the company home, and to that sad note the horsemen faced towards Pendellion. And somehow Mr. Joliffe and his long nose disappeared and Merryn rode back beside Michael Erisey, and Venetia with Trevennor, and the hounds in their couples pattered in front. They came up on to the hill and half Cornwall lay behind them, with pools of silver light falling on the sea towards Pentire.

'I love this country,' said Venetia suddenly.

'I could live in no other,' said Venn. 'Everyone worth a fig—Drake, Gilbert, Frobisher, Hawkins, Raleigh—comes from the west.'

Oh it was untrue, that! Venetia's whole heart cried out against it. The west had a formidable share, but what of Philip Sidney, and the Howards, and the Percies, and



the Mortimers from the Welsh marches, what of her father, cooped up in his little room in the Marshalsea?

'It would do you all a power of good to go to London,' she said.

Trevennor stared, his dark face puzzled.

'What would I be a-doing of in London! Cornwall's good enough for me! Unless it's voyaging—that's another matter.'

He was born a Cornishman and would live and die one. He would marry a Cornish-woman, as they all did, a worthy girl like his sister Thomasine, and have Cornish children. Dull as a map, she saw Venn's life planned out before him.

But that, too, Venetia knew was unjust. Wherever he chose to live out his life, Trevennor would never be dull.

## Chapter 9

### VENETIA RIDES ALONE

ONE day Peter and Peregrine, Venn and Venetia were in Barbary Gutter, that lonely place by the stream where Venetia had nearly broken her neck the first morning. Perry was at his old game of building dams; he and Peter were splashing about among the kingcups with their breeches hitched high. They were becoming great friends, those two. Peter was a year the younger and his admiration gave Perry just that flip of confidence that he needed.

Venetia and Venn lay on their middles on the turf, idle and 'contented. Around them, the slopes were carpeted with starry blue flowers which Venetia had never seen before—'squill', Venn called them. Pink thrift was out along the cliff edge and the Atlantic before them was full of changing blue lights. Closing her eyes, Venetia let the sun pour down on her face and the measured swing of the tide drown her senses in its booming roar.

'Out there, away and away,' said Venn dreamily, 'and you would come to a country called Wingandacoa, where red men wear feathers in their hair.'

'And south-westerly,' said Venetia, 'to the Spanish Main and Magellan and the South Sea.'

(Was it an echo in her mind that kept repeating like the tick-tock of a pendulum—'My tall ship sails from New Spain west-south-west, into those uncharted seas . . . I sail on, west-south-westerly, until I make my landfall in the lost continent—Terra Australis.')

'Curse these plaguey flies! It's the off-shore wind after rain that brings 'em.'

No, she was in Barbary Gutter now, lying among the squill listening to the Atlantic, and Venn's brown hands beside her were plaiting a wand out of rushes to keep off the midges.

'It is eleven days since we came to Pendellion, Venn.'

'Indeed! I would have thought it longer!'

They were quiet again for a while. Then Venn said unexpectedly:

'Some evening, when you can spare it, I would like to read your Malory, Venetia.'

'You said you hated reading.'

'I never said I *hated* it. Besides, if someone else reads to me I feel all the while they are missing out exciting bits, lest they are considered unsuitable for innocent ears.'

'I found a lovely piece yesterday. This:—

"And then they rode to the dykes, and saw them double dyked with full warlike walls; and there were lodged many great lords nigh the walls; and there was great noise of minstrelsy; and the sea beat upon the one side of the walls, where were many ships and mariners' noise 'with hale and how'."

"'With hale and how'! That is good. What a memory you have! You and I should start a King Arthur's Fellowship.'

Venetia sat bolt upright, illumined by a sudden idea.

'Why not, why ever not? The Fellowship of the Table Round. To meet at Joyous Gard.—Perry, Peter! Perry, come here at once!'

'Now what's brewing, red-head?' teased Trevennor, but she was too excited to rise to his bait. Perry and Peter appeared reluctantly, their legs plastered with mud well above the knee.

'Perry, we are going to tell them about Joyous Gard, and to form a Fellowship.'

Perry looked doubtfully at Trevennor. Peter sat down beside them, digging his wet toes into the grass. He, too, was dark, more stolid than Venn and a great one for listening.

‘How does Joyous Gard come into it?’ asked Venn good-humouredly.

‘It’s our name for Lynn, Merryn’s house up the valley. We came upon it in the woods that day we were late for dinner, and we’ve been back twice since.’ And Venetia told him the story, prompted at intervals by Perry, how they had ridden through the forest like knights errant, and had suddenly found their enchanted castle, Joyous Gard. How Venetia had broken into the great dusty room, and how, the second time, they had found the window again unfastened and Perry had gone in to see for himself.

‘I have never been there since it was shut up,’ said Venn. ‘An old caretaker lives there with his family. I wonder how they came to leave that window unlatched?’

‘Now, what of your Fellowship, Venn? We could meet there in that great room and no one the wiser, and you could be Tristram as you always were, and Christo Lance-lot—would Christo join, do you think?’

‘I believe he would!’ cried Venn.

‘And we could take a terrible vow,’ said Perry, ‘and swear to be knights guerdonless.’

‘But what of the caretaker? Surely he would hear us?’

‘We call him Maligerance——’ shouted Perry.

‘Meliagraunce,’ prompted his sister. ‘He lives away in the back wing and sleeps in the afternoons, and goes to bed at sunset, I suppose. Last time we went down there we spied on him and heard him say he was about to sleep off his dinner.’

‘We could sign our names in blood, and meet there



on windy nights to talk of ghosts,' said Peter, who was fascinated by the macabre.

'What knight could I be?' asked Perry.

'You could be Dinadan the Fool!' said Venetia rudely.

'Or Gareth?' said Perry.

'And Peter could be Sir Kay the Seneschal.'

'He wasn't a very pleasant man, was he?' asked Peter uneasily.

'He was Arthur's step-brother, though. Who shall be King Arthur?'

There was a pause, then a chorus—

'Christo.'

They sat there in Barbary Gutter, staring at one another. So was the Fellowship born.

'I can tell Christo this evening,' said Venn. 'He's one of us. It will be all right. Anyone else?'

'Henry?' said Peter.

'Thomasine?' said Venetia.

'Henry is safe enough. He won't be much help because he is away so often with father, but he can belong. But must we have Thomasine?'

'It is rather unfair to leave her out,' Venetia was somehow sorry for Thomasine.

'Oh very well—we'll see what Christo says. He can manage her.'

'When shall we meet?' said Venetia to Venn.

'Why not to-morrow afternoon? We can slip away after dinner—it will be easy because Sosthenes and Master Ferrars are off to visit the schoolmaster in Allenbridge and Michael has to interview a lawyer for father. If Christo can arrange his parson right we should all be free.'

'Then we can be sworn in,' said Perry, and Peter's eyes glowed at visions of blood and churchyards.

'Time we went,' Venn stretched and rose. 'Where are you to now, Venetia?'

'I think I will go for a ride. Coming?'

'No hope! Sosthenes has set me a translation for posting a rhyme on the inside of his wash-tub, and Michael is giving me extra tuition on the fiddle. I couldn't do anything right yesterday, it seems!'

'What did the rhyme say?'

' "Sosthenes, Sosthenes,  
Why not wash and drown the fleas?"'

—nothing more. Would you like to ride *Roister Doister* for a change? He is good on steep slopes.'

'I might. Thank you.'

They wandered back across the fields, talking of the new Fellowship. Trevennor was right, thought Venetia. It seemed more than eleven days since she and Perry had come to Pendellion. Time passed so quickly. Study with Master Ferrars or Sosthenes Brent (they worked in close partnership now, taking alternate lessons, which suited themselves and the children, who could get away with less work!), sewing with Mistress Chamond and music with Michael Erisey—his private orchestra was already practising hard and they played in the gallery twice a week. Besides all this, there were her duties as gentlewoman to Merryn, and occasional help to Lady Treherne in arranging flowers, and in dairy or stillroom. And riding and archery, and some hawking, and any time that was over ranging the deer-park or the woods with Venn, or coming down to Barbary Gutter—it was a crowded life.

Her thoughts went to a letter she had received from her father only a few days ago,

*From my room in the Marshalsea Gaol. May Day.*

SWEET DAUGHTER [he had written],

Learn to love your life. You have it with you but once

and many there are who live their lives blindly, knowing not what they miss until it is too late, which same is a poor reward to a provident God.

No, a provident God would not find her ungrateful.

In the end she rode Venn's pony, *Roister*, and took with her her true-gentle falcon, *Magic*. He was an attractive bird, reddish-brown like a peregrine and very tame. Venn's black St. Hubert hound also chose to come so she was not lacking for company.

Venetia rode to St. Ruan. The banks in the valley were a tangle of hart's tongue and nettles, wild hyacinths and red robin. It was hot inland, a damp sticky warmth, not the salty beating sun of the cliffs. St. Ruan village seemed asleep and the tall shadow of the church tower already lay across the cottage roofs. How they had rung those bells on Sunday last—a glorious clamour, peal on peal of iron tongues. Christo said that St. Ruan held the silver bell for change-ringing for miles around.

'Here, *Just*, to heel!'

The big black hound bounded out of a backyard with a guilty look and something unspeakable in his mouth. Venetia chased after him and he dropped it, but *Magic*, the falcon, ruffled his plumage protestingly, his jess bells tinkling, and *Roister* began to fidget. Venetia took the track from the village that led along the river past Joyous Gard.

There was a great peace on the house. From this side it looked less like a castle, but even more gracious and friendly. A girl and a young man were standing close together by the gate and as Venetia came up they parted hastily and the girl ran up a path to the back of the house. She wore a blue apron and went bare-foot. The man touched his forelock, very red about the ears, and turned

back along the road to St. Ruan, and Venetia recognized Jewell, the huntsman.

Here was a new figure in the drama, probably the daughter of Meliagraunce. A tiny incident that would have passed unnoticed, a groom saying farewell to his girl outside the gate, became significant when it concerned Joyous Gard.

Venetia rode in a wide circle round the house and saw Meliagraunce come out of a side door, yawning and with his hair tousled, pick up his spade and set to digging his vegetable plot. It must be about five o'clock. He would have had his sleep and be filling in the time till supper. Venetia wondered if Merryn realized what a comfortable, idle existence the caretaker led in her old home, drowsing the hours away, drinking from her silver flagon when he felt thirsty, digging in his garden at evening.

From this side she had the view she loved, the meadow, the octagonal tower and the tall unshuttered windows. She would like to have stood a few minutes to let the atmosphere soak into her, but *Roister* had smelt his stable and was impatient to be on. To-morrow they would all be gathered there, the knights of Joyous Gard. When she reached the upward path through the trees leading to Pendellion gate, Venetia, as always, looked back. And as she did so she dropped her riding switch.

It was a very ordinary occurrence and she reacted in an ordinary way by dismounting to pick it up. There the trouble began. Venn's cob *Roister* was neither so well exercised nor so well trained as *Grey Mortimer*, and would not stand to let her mount again. The moment he felt her foot in the stirrup he started swinging round in a circle, tossing his head and stamping. *Just* came rushing back to see what was afoot and started jumping up at *Roister*, snapping and barking. Venetia was in addition impeded



by having only the use of her left hand, as *Magic* balanced on her right with much fluttering and an angry jangle of his bells. She tried again and again, getting hotter and more and more exasperated. *Roister*, also beginning to lose his temper, showed signs of rearing. Venetia felt that choking baffled fury that comes with the knowledge that an animal is winning a battle of wills. There was no one at hand to help her, or call off *Just*, or relieve her of the hawk. It was not that she minded the short walk home, but it was this misery of being beaten and giving in that brought the tears of rage to her eyes.

It was then that the gipsy appeared. She must have just stepped out from among the branches because *Roister*, startled, stopped his eternal circling to stare. She was a girl rather older than Venetia, and even at that moment it was impossible to ignore her beauty. She was small and slender and wore a patched brown shirt, a full red skirt and gold bracelets and ear-rings. Her blue-black hair fell forward in two long braids to her waist. She had black almond-shaped eyes, somewhat like a faun's, and an oval face of a smooth, golden brown.

'Can you help me?' gasped Venetia. 'I am trying to mount.'

The girl hesitated, as if she had only half understood, but it needed little perception to realize what was needed. She came forward, speaking to *Roister* in a strange tongue, and at her touch he immediately quieted down. She had tiny brown hands and it was as if they carried some enchantment in them, what the old songs called 'glamourie'. The pony stood like a rock while Venetia mounted again, and she saw *Just* come up and lick the girl's bare feet.

'I owe you many thanks,' said Venetia, hunting frantically in her pockets for a coin. 'What is your name?'

‘Pepa,’ said a low, foreign voice.

‘Here are two groats, Pepa, and thank you.’

Venetia was half-afraid she would disdain to take it. She did not hesitate, but the royal gesture with which she accepted the charity seemed to turn the tables. She bowed in grave acknowledgement, and Venetia rode away with an image engraved on her mind—a fascinating face framed by gold ear-rings, a tattered red skirt, and a most queenly carriage, all in a setting of green leaves.

And as she came up the hill to Pendellion she found herself singing:

‘Three gipsies stood at the castle gate,  
They sang so high, they sang so low;  
The lady in her chamber sate,  
Her heart it melted away as snow.

‘They sang so sweet, they sang so shrill,  
That fast her tears began to flow.  
And she laid down her silken gown,  
Her golden rings and all her show.

‘“What care I for a goose-feather bed,  
With the sheet turned down so bravely O?  
For to-night I shall sleep in a cold open field.  
Along with the raggle-taggle gipsies O.”’

## Chapter 10

### THE FORMING OF THE FELLOWSHIP

'VENETIA,' said Merryn next day, when they were together in Merryn's room before dinner, 'would you and your brother care to come with us to Plymouth next week?'

'To *Plymouth*, Merryn?'

'Yes, Sir John is taking me for a few days to settle up my affairs with the lawyers—Mr. Erisey is making the arrangements to-day. We have been invited to stay with the cousins at Mount Edgcumbe and I thought you two might like to come. There is a chance we might see something of Sir Humphrey Gilbert's fleet who are setting forth on another voyage of discovery—if they have not sailed before we arrive there.'

'Oh, I know! Mr. Raleigh has a ship among them. There was much talk of it in London—I think father has some money invested in it.'

Venetia's first thought had been of Joyous Gard and a disinclination to leave Pendellion, but hearing of Sir Humphrey Gilbert's fleet had swayed her over. It was the voyage her father had spoken of, that had been discussed at supper at Mortimer House, and both she and Perry would dearly love to set eyes on the ships.

'Who else will be with you, Merryn?'

'Michael Erisey, and probably Christopher, and Henry, of course. To absolve you from lessons, I think we might call it the Whitsun holiday!'

'It is very kind of you,' said Venetia. It was extraordinarily kind. She found herself wishing that Venn was

of the party, but Christo was the next best and it would only be for a few days.

'We take it as arranged then,' said Merryn cheerfully. 'Does Sir John approve?'

'Not much. But he says if I desire to saddle myself with trouble it is mine own burial! It is up to you to win him over by your docile behaviour! Is my hair neat at the back, Venetia?'

Venetia looked to the hair and then her eyes met Merryn's in the glass. She is so lovely, thought Venetia suddenly, and looks so sad.

'It is a strange fate that takes me to Plymouth at this time,' said Merryn. 'It was from Dartmouth that Gilbert sailed before, in 'seventy-eight. They went in September. Sir John and I stood on the Kingswear side, where the Dart flows into the sea—the river is passing narrow there—and we saw Peter quite plainly on the quarterdeck, waving his hat to us. He was in cramasie velvet. We stood there, I remember, following those little ships with our eyes until we could see nothing but their sails and the wash of their foam.'

Venetia, too, could see him in her mind, that gallant young figure in cramasie velvet, who never came back. There was nothing to be said.

'Heigh-ho!' said Merryn, 'and life still runs on. And we with it, willy-nilly, and sometimes happiness comes to us again, but it never seems to stay.'

'Father says,' said Venetia, 'that we must learn to love our lives because we have them but once, and that to do otherwise is ungrateful to God.'

'Maybe your father is right,' said Merryn quietly. 'He, too, came by his knowledge hardly.'

This conversation had served to divert Venetia's attention from the afternoon, but at dinner, when Venn caught



her glance across the table and nodded, Joyous Gard came uppermost again and she only longed for the eating to be done with.

Oh, those endless dinners at Pendellion, the long tables laden and the faces shining in the midday heat! The Chief Yeoman headed one table, Rowland Mundy, the Steward, the other, where sat the schoolmasters and Mistress Chamond and the lesser guests. The family table stood cross-wise on a higher level, with Sir John at the top (or Christopher when he was away) and Lady Treherne opposite. Only those at the top table talked, and then conversation was mostly with the guests. There were nearly always guests—Roscarrocks and Arundells, Prideaux, Trevanions and Killigrews—the close neighbours came to dine regularly once a week. They were all related in some way to the Trehernes. They talked about the familiar things, farming prices, rents, and the chances of the harvest, the defence of the coast and training the levies, tin mining, and the absorbing discussion of other relatives and friends:

And oh! the procession of the dishes—the soups and the fish, the sirloins and the shoulders of mutton, the venison and the hares, the chickens and turkeys and peacocks; the salads, the fruit tarts and pies, the jellies and marchpane; the cheeses; the fruit; the wines. It was not what people ate (many partook sparingly) but the time they took to get through with it and the ceremony that went with it. For two hours they would sit there, sometimes even three. But never had a meal seemed so endlessly drawn-out as to-day, when Venn looked at Venetia, and Venetia up the table to Christo, and Christo back to Peter and Perry—and still they sat on, and still Sir John talked and talked——

It had to end sometime, but the delirious relief of it

was almost too strong. They held still while the guests washed their hands in the silver basins, while grace was said and their betters formally paraded out, and then they were free. There was a wild stampede for the door.

‘Meet you in fifteen minutes by the gate at the edge of the woods,’ whispered Venn to Venetia. ‘The others know, but we are proceeding there separately. I am taking the wine. You and I can talk it over on the way.’

Walking through the woods to Joyous Gard, they discussed together the ceremony of swearing in the Fellowship. Venetia had a terrible thought:

‘Suppose, to-day of all days, we should find the window fastened.’

‘That matter is quite safe,’ said Trevennor, ‘I have set my spies to work, and see what I have found! The man you call Meliagraunce has a shrewish wife and one daughter called Julian. Now, the parents are ambitious for Julian. She works in our dairy at the present——’

‘I know her!’ interrupted Venetia, ‘pretty, only she gets into trouble with your mother for wearing her hair too long and loose, which is not cleanly among the cream.’

‘Listen, red-head! Meliagraunce and his madam have planned a match for Julian with one of the sons of Farmer Pengelly over St. Elid way. Julian, however, has taken a fancy to our Rob Jewell, who seems good enough to her mind. Meliagraunce and his spouse won’t hear of it, so Mistress Julian, who is a lady of spirit, takes her own sweet way and of an evening, when the old ones are a-bed, out she creeps a-courting in the valley. There you have the reason for your unlatched window!’

‘I see,’ said Venetia uneasily, ‘though I don’t much like it. She is the more likely to come upon us and raise the hue and cry.’

'What! and be caught coming in from a moonlight prow! with Rob Jewell? Not likely! Anyhow, I think I can settle with him—Rob is my very good friend.'

'She is taking undue risks if she fears Meliagraunce so much, for yesterday I caught her and Jewell bidding good-bye to one another in broad daylight at the gate, under his very nose!'

'You saw them there! Excellent. That's a great dagger to hang over their heads.'

'Venn, you are growing subtle as a Jesuit,' said Venetia crossly. 'I am beginning to wonder if all this plotting under her roof is fair to Merryn.'

Trevennor stopped to stare incredulously.

'And they don't breed us cowardly up in London either! No, Venn, I don't mean it—come on.'

'You had better make up your mind before you take the oath,' said Venn coldly.

They tramped on through the flickering shadows, disliking each other.

'I'm off to Plymouth next week,' said Venetia.

Trevennor turned on her and went quite white.

'When? Who said so? For how long?'

'For a few days, with Merryn and Sir John. Take care, you have spilt some wine!'

They passed through the gateway and down the track to Lynn, and Venetia looked around for signs of Pepa, the gipsy. She had not told Venn of that incident; first because she did not wish to admit that his *Roister* had defeated her, and secondly because she was somehow afraid of exposing so beautiful and fey a being to his sharp comments. Venn would never believe in the fascination of that gipsy girl unless he saw her, and Venetia (with her head stuffed full of stories of Thomas the Rhymer and the Queen of Elfland) did not really want them to meet.

She might turn out to be a beautiful witch, and then where would poor Trevennor be?

Venetia need have had no fear. Pepa was not to be seen.

At the edge of the trees, where she had waited with the horses that first morning, Perry stood with Peter.

'Christo and Thomasine have gone in,' he whispered, 'I showed them the way. The house is still as the grave. There's only Henry to come now.'

'Don't wait for him longer than five minutes,' answered Venn. 'He may have been kept at the end.'

Venetia noted with amusement that Peter, with his wide-brimmed hat pulled over his eyes and a dark cloak slung across the lower part of his face, had the appearance of the most murderous type of assassin.

She started across the long grass but Trevennor pulled her back, shocked to his countryman's soul.

'You *can't* walk over meadow hay, surely you know that! We'll go round by the path.'

Venetia obeyed meekly, hoping Venn would not notice the tracks of their former journeys through the very heart of the hay-field.

Her dear Joyous Gard, stately and gracious, knee-deep in its buttercups and meadow-sweet and drowsy summer silence! They crept round the tower to the tall windows and, as they clambered in, they saw Perry and Peter, with Henry, following them.

So they assembled in the big dusty room—Christo and Thomasine, Venn and Venetia, Henry and Perry and Peter. They carried the round walnut table into the centre and filled the silver flagon with the wine Trevennor had brought, and the boys, one by one, laid their swords down in front of it. Then Venn drew out a golden circlet and placed that, too, on the table. It lay there, the gold and the silver, on the Round Table, and the sun slanting



through the coats-of-arms splashed the shining heap with blue and scarlet. The winged stag above the fireplace looked down on them, and another shaft of sun fell across the motto—LOYALTY. No one spoke or moved, and all around pressed the immense and watchful silence of Joyous Gard.

‘Knights and Ladies,’ began Trevennor slowly, and at his words the tension eased—it was the first time Venetia had heard a human voice in Joyous Gard. ‘We are come here to honour the men of renown, knights of virtue and gentleness and passing great prowess, who upheld the realm in the days of Arthur, the Christian king, and of our own accord to swear loyalty to the Fellowship of Joyous Gard. I require each one of you, severally and distinctly, to repeat the oath, tasting the wine of the cup and kissing his sword in token of faith, the ladies to curtsy low as is due to ceremonious observance. Christopher Treherne, stand forth!’

Christopher came forward and stood before the table.

‘Repeat after me,’ said Trevennor, and Christo repeated quietly the words of the oath.

‘I, Christopher Treherne, hereby pledge in this cup and swear on my sword to uphold the Fellowship of the Round Table and abide by all its laws.

To meet high adventure with courage,

To answer kindness with courtesy,

To serve my friends with loyalty.

Which vow, if broken, shall bring eternal dishonour on my sword. Gloria!’

‘Christopher Treherne, I crown you Arthur, King of Britain’—Trevennor placed the gold circlet on his head—‘And give into your hand the sword of Sir Launcelot du Lake.’ And he handed him back his sword. ‘From this hour you are Arthur the King and Sir Launcelot.’

Christopher drank from the flagon and replaced it on the Round Table. Then he saluted with his bare blade, kissed the hilt, returned it to the salute. The sunlight ran along the steel as he slipped it back into the sheath.

Christopher now took over, causing Venn to repeat the oath after him, and handed him the sword of Tristram of Lyonesse. Henry, in his turn, was named Sir Gareth; Peregrine, Sir Lamorak of Wales and Sir Dinadan the Jester; Peter, Sir Kay the Seneschal.

All up to now had proceeded with a moving solemnity. Then Thomasine came forward in her turn, to be named Queen Guinevere. She had to miss out the allusions to the sword and to curtsy when she had drunk out of the cup. She bungled her curtsy and, being thirteen and self-conscious, giggled nervously. There was a moment of icy silence. Then Christo said gravely:

‘Stand forth, Venetia Mortimer!’

Venetia stepped into the sunlight which shone full on her hair. There were no swords left now on the Round Table, only the silver flagon and the blue, gold and scarlet from the window patterned on the wood. She repeated after Christo:

‘I, Venetia Mortimer, hereby pledge in this cup and do swear to uphold the Fellowship of the Round Table and abide by all its laws.

To meet high adventure with courage,

To answer kindness with courtesy,

To serve my friends with loyalty.

Which vow, if broken, shall bring eternal dishonour on my name.  
Gloria!’

‘Venetia Mortimer,’ said Trevennor, ‘I give to you the cup of Isold the Beautiful.’

He handed her the cup and Venetia drank, as Isold herself had taken from Tristram the wine in the golden flacket as they sailed from Ireland into Cornwall, but

that wine had been a love potion and their love had never departed the days of their life.

It was over, they were sworn in as Knights of the Fellowship. Now it was finished no one seemed to know what to do next.

'We had best move the table back,' said Tristram of Lyonesse. 'Have you the gold circlet, my lord the King? It comes off the stand of father's big gold salt cellar.'

They left a little wine in the bottom of the flagon as it seemed a pity to waste it and no one liked to 'finish it up' after the high ceremony of the oath. Otherwise the room was just as before.

'I wish we had signed in blood,' said Sir Kay the Seneschal regretfully.

'I am Dinadan the japer!' declaimed Perry excited, careering along the floor on a stool.

'Be *quiet*, for the Lord's sake!' said all the knights at once, expecting any minute to hear Meliagraunce's heavy tread at the door.

After that it was obviously high time to go. Venn and Venetia climbed out last, Venetia closing the window carefully. They hurried back across the field by the path to the safety of the trees.

'Glowing smoke!' said Venn. 'What a Guinevere!'

## *Chapter II*

### IN PLYMOUTH TOWN

THE weather continued warm and fine for the ride to Plymouth. They went by Bodmin moors, a lonely road forsaken by God and man, where the gentlemen of the party travelled on the outside with armed servants before and behind, as a guard against footpads. Because it was Friday, and Sir John and Merryn wished to interview their lawyers next day, before the Sabbath holiday, they crossed the Tamar by Saltash passage and stayed that night at an inn in Plymouth, instead of going direct to Mount Edgcumbe.

On the Saturday morning Sir John, Merryn and Mr. Erisey being about their business, Christo took Venetia and Perry through the centre of the town, called the Barbican, to look at the docks.

They stood together on the quay, watching casks and barrels of provisions being rolled aboard a pinnace, and bales of merchandise unloading from a ship just in from the Levant, and studied all the figureheads alongside—one was a fat negress with grinning teeth and another a triton with a spear, and a third a mermaid. There was an organized hustle everywhere but no one seemed too busy to pass on a joke, or to pause now and then and wink across at the children.

Perry was in his paradise.

‘See that man coiling a rope, how neatly he does it! Oh Venetia, look at that boy climbing up the ratlines!—He can be no older than me. Now there’s a man blowing a whistle——’



'That's the boatswain,' said Christo, 'piping them aloft.'

They watched, fascinated, as, in answer to the thin pipe, the seamen went swarming up into the shrouds, out along the mainyard and on to the topsail yards. The deftness and speed with which they worked was a miracle to see, and yet the boatswain down below didn't seem to think it fast enough for all the while he cursed at them roundly.

'If his captain heard him I expect he would be cautioned,' said Christo. 'Drake, they say, clamps down mighty hard on swearing aboard, though he swears himself like a moss-trooper when he thinks fit.'

They watched gun teams cleaning and greasing the culverins and cannon, big men stripped to the waist with matted hair on their chests and the sweat pouring down them. A Gentleman Adventurer was standing by one gun, as fastidious as a courtier, holding a scented pomander to his nose. But on another vessel the officers were working in their shirt-sleeves alongside the mariners.

They saw a ship, the same that had a negress for figure-head and had piped the crew aloft, being pulled clear of her berth by a crowd of men straining on ropes. They did not pull steadily but in long hauls, all together, giving a strange sort of grunt which grew in volume until it became a chant. It set them the time as they pulled; there were two or three voices which took up the solo parts, and the refrain answered them in that grunting, swelling chorus. And then the ship began to move along the quayside and the chanting took on a ring of triumph. She moved faster, swinging into the stream, and the canvas filled and the ensign, a red cross on green and white field, broke from her masthead, and they cast her adrift from the shore and she was under way, lovely as a great bird, taking her course for Mount Batten and the open Sound.

'Oh!' breathed Perry, and could say no more.

'Ask which are Sir Humphrey Gilbert's ships,' said Venetia to Christo.

Christo chose a very ancient seaman with a knotted kerchief at his throat. He was deaf and apparently witless because, after Christo had shouted the question at him twice, he smiled toothlessly and said: 'Aah!'

Their attempt at a conversation seemed to be causing a block in the passageway and there were a number of men trying to elbow past. The foremost was close enough to hear Christo's question and its disappointing answer.

'Go up to the Hoe,' he advised, 'Gilbert's ships are lying in the anchorage against St. Nicholas' Island. You'll see them fairly from there.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Christo, because his informant was a little man with an air, dressed very fine.

'Do you know the name of Mr. Walter Raleigh's ship?' asked Venetia as she moved aside. It had escaped her and she had been searching her memory for some time.

She looked up into a round, reddish, weather-beaten face and blue eyes with kindly little lines about them, a face with something of the boy in it still.

'The *Barque Raleigh*, sweet heart,' he said, amused. 'What else would you expect?'

They all went on. The toothless old mariner came out of his trance. He leaned forward until his beery breath was offensively close and tapped Venetia on the shoulder.

'Yon's Frankie Drake,' he said, with a wink.

From that open grassy cliff-top called the Hoe there was a magnificent view of Plymouth Sound. There were five ships anchored by the island opposite, two large and the other three smaller, and these, they decided, must be Sir Humphrey Gilbert's fleet.

'Do ask that man!' said Venetia to Christo.

'He's probably another hopeless idiot, if he's not Mr. Raleigh himself!' said Christo, but being the soul of good nature he obeyed. This man, an affluent worthy with fur on his gown, was most friendly:

'Yes indeed. You'm strange in these parts, I take it. Have you seen our compass yet? Ah, you must see the compass. Set there two years past by order of Sir Francis Drake it was, while he was Mayor. Mighty fine Mayor he was too; he will be coming up again they say. Put us all in the way of wearing the red robes, he did—I'm an alderman, though I say it meself—and very noble it looks when we parade to the court-room. John Spark, our present Mayor, he's an excellent man, but we are all proper proud of our Frankie. The Queen's put him on a Royal Commission they say, all to do with the Navy. 'Twas Drake ordered the red robes, he did, for the Mayor and the Court of Aldermen——'

As soon as they had admired the compass they made some excuses and extricated themselves, just before the red robes came up for the third time. However fervently one admired Sir Francis Drake the circumnavigator, his innovations during his mayoralty were hardly so exciting as Gilbert's fleet, especially to those who had just exchanged words with the great man himself!

At dinner in their inn they found the rest of the party, also in high spirits. Matters were being cleared up satisfactorily and Sir John, over his third glass of wine, remarked that the end of the whole damned case was in sight.

'And if it is,' thought Venetia a trifle bitterly, 'it is my father who has brought it about by killing Bodrugan, and he who pays the price for it.'

But she soon cheered up in the account of their morning's adventures. Michael Erisey, most annoyingly, kept

saying that he was sure Drake was out of Plymouth and that the half-witted old mariner had just been fooling them. But Venetia was quite convinced that their fine little man was none but the great Sir Francis.

They went on that afternoon to Mount Edgcumbe, which lay across the stretch of water called the Hamoaze, in Cornwall. Sir John had sent a servant on to announce their arrival, and when they reached the little fishing town of Stonehouse they found the Steward of the household waiting for them with a horse ferry.

It was a very still afternoon and the water slid by like glass as they crossed over. There was no sun but a luminous glare that hurt the eyes. The Steward pointed out to Sir John and Merryn the ships lying up the Hamoaze towards Saltash, and the woods that concealed Anthony House, where the Carews lived, and the new forts they were building on either bank to hold the passage.

‘This all belonging to Sir Piers,’ said the Steward. ‘He has taken an interest in the placing of the fortification.’

‘Of course,’ said Sir John. ‘How goes the training of men in this part of the world, and how are you off for ammunition?’

And away went the endless discussion that the children knew by heart, the invasion—against the invasion. Would it ever really come? Would a great invading armada ever come up the coast to attempt the conquest of this realm of England, or was it just a bogy served out to keep the country gentry on their toes and off politics and religion?—which was what Venn had once suggested.

On the far bank they were in Cornwall again. The gates of Mount Edgcumbe stood facing them, well wrought and imposing, and they passed between them and rode uphill, along a double avenue of young trees, towards the house.



Suddenly there was an ear-splitting crack which startled all the horses, and *Grey Mortimer* swung round and faced the way he had come. Then came another bang, and another.

'What in heaven's name would that be!' said Venetia, who had nearly been unseated. 'Has the invasion begun already?'

'The guns on the shore are firing a salute in your honour,' smiled the Steward.

'Body o' me!' said Sir John, deeply impressed, 'a generous welcome to guests.'

By the tone of his voice they all had an unhappy feeling that he was considering lining the road from St. Ruan to Pendellion with culverins!

But it was exciting, riding up to the great house with the cannon roaring a salute—in keeping with the queer tension of the day. The road swept round to the left and they found themselves on a terrace that faced the Hamoaze, with a magnificent view of the Sound. The house was on their right, a graceful mansion with a battlemented coping and towers at either end, and two flights of steps leading up to the door.

It was a somewhat overwhelming family party that gathered to meet them in the high echoing hall. Everybody seemed to be kissing everybody else and there was the confused sort of burble that accompanies a re-union. All were convinced that Venetia was Thomasine ('How you have grown, dear child, and the likeness to Sir John really remarkable!') and in five minutes Perry was called Trevennor, Peter and Johnny (John, Venetia remembered having heard, was the second Treherne son who had died five years ago!).

But by the time they reached the parlour, the party had been more or less sorted out. Venetia had placed her

host, Sir Piers Edgcumbe, and his wife, the lady Margaret; Margaret, the eldest daughter (whose face was somehow familiar), another daughter of Thomasine's age or older, called Anne, and a tall young man called Richard, who appeared to be the eldest son.

While they were settling down, still all talking at once, someone else came in, a man with broad shoulders and a confident bearing, splendidly dressed in the height of the fashion. For one moment Venetia thought of Mr. Raleigh, but at once she realized the difference; this man had bright red hair and a little red beard, and there was much more humour in his face. Sir Piers said:

'Mrs. Treherne, may I present my future son-in-law, Ned Denny? He and Meg have known each other for some years, while she was at Court.'

That helped Venetia to remember when she had seen young Margaret Edgcumbe before. She was one of the Maids of Honour to the Queen. Venetia had seen her riding with the Court, very costly in white satin, and had heard her described as a great favourite. Ned Denny, too, was a name she had heard often as belonging to the circle close to the throne.

All this chased through her mind while Mr. Denny was stepping forward to salute Merryn. Suddenly he stopped and stared, then recollected himself and bowed over her hand.

'Good evening, Mr. Denny. So we meet yet again!'

'Ah, you know each other, of course—I had forgot you too were at the Court, Mrs. Treherne. How small a place the world is, to be sure!' Sir Piers moved across the room to Sir John and Denny followed Merryn to the window. They were quite close to Venetia, where she sat quietly watching the gathering, and she could hear all they said.

Merryn, looking down on the Sound, spoke first:

'Forgive me for being so foolishly disconcerted, Ned. I was not expecting to meet you and I suppose the sight of your cousin Gilbert's fleet lying out there has unnerved me.'

'What is five years, madam, when it comes to remembering!'

'They seem yesterday, since I came to Plymouth. But then I have done so little in those five years and you so much! Do you not wish you, too, could put back the clock and were preparing to set out once again with Gilbert, with your own stout ship down among them there under the island?'

'Maybe I do. But we sober down. I have taken up with Ireland, which is the grave of all brave men's dreams! And my Meg over there has me fast on a string.' He smiled across the room at Margaret Edgcumbe who had been watching the conversation with a puzzled frown, and she smiled back quickly.

'You are famous these days,' said Merryn, 'taking the Court by storm as you took the surrender at Smerwick fort.'

'Not famous at Court!' cried Ned Denny. 'I leave that storming to my cousin Walter Raleigh. Step by step I kept level with him, madam, in Ireland and on the high seas for all these years, but since we came back to London, look how he has soared ahead! Still, I think my position as Court Jester, about to seek respectability in matrimony, has the fewer pitfalls.'

Merryn laughed. Her eyes fell on Venetia.

'I would like you to meet my young ward, Mistress Venetia Mortimer. You must know her father, Sir Nicholas.'

Ned Denny's handsome face lit up at once:

'Indeed I know him well. He and I share a very dear friend, Venetia—Philip Sidney. I saw Philip only the other day, staying at my cousin Walsingham's.'

'Oh, is he well?' asked Venetia, rising quickly to news of her beloved Philip.

'Very well. I think I might say, very well indeed. I have never seen him better. Astrophel, they say, is deserting his Stella.'

'No, not really!' exclaimed Merryn.

'Gossip, madam, pure gossip. I love it. See how soft I become! As to your father, Venetia, we'll have him out of prison before the summer is out. We are all in the plot now—the Queen and the Council haven't a chance!'

'Hello, sir!' said Christo.

'Christopher, upon my soul!'

'Now where did you know our Christo?' said Merryn.

'When he was page last year with my cousins the Champernownes at Modbury.'

'Lord!' thought Venetia, 'had ever a man so many cousins!' But she liked Ned Denny—his red hair and the laughter at the back of his eyes. And he was of the company of Sidney and Raleigh and her father, the salt of the earth.

'You see,' smiled Margaret Edgcumbe, coming over while Christo and Mr. Denny talked, 'it will be like this through life, from now on. It is brought on myself for choosing to marry such a man, who makes friends any time, anywhere, always. To give him his due, he makes an occasional enemy to eke it out.'

'You don't do so badly for friends, yourself, madam,' said Merryn.

Ned Denny turned back to them.

'I *am* enjoying myself hugely this evening! Margaret, my sweet, I have just thought—if Humphrey is still in



harbour on Monday, shall I propose we go aboard to visit him? The children would enjoy it and I know you would! How about you, Mrs. Treherne, perhaps you would prefer not?"

Merryn hesitated, but only for a moment.

'I think I would like to. It might help to lay the ghosts.'

'He will be happy to see you again, I know. Humphrey is never one to forget old friends. Provided, of course, he don't get his fair wind first.'

Venetia was wildly excited at the thought of going on board Sir Humphrey Gilbert's ship. Oh, if only, if only there were no wind Sunday or Monday, or else it blew contrary!

She could hardly sleep that night for thinking of it. Once the panes rattled as a breeze came across the Sound and she jumped out of bed and ran to the window, pulling the curtain aside. The whole of that great stretch of water, from Saltash up the Tamar round to the headland they called Gara Point, lay like a sheet of solid silver in the moonlight. There was the long clean sweep of the Hoe just opposite, and the black hump of St. Nicholas' Island, and this side the island, with their bow and stern lights burning steadily, the dark smudges of Gilbert's ships—waiting, waiting for the wind.

Venetia opened the window and laid her cheek on the sill. The night air was sweet and cool. She heard a barn owl call in his hunting and a pheasant chuck once in the park. She thought of her father in London, waiting to be freed, and of Venn at Pendellion (always impatient of sleep) waiting for the promise of the morning, and of Gilbert down there in the Sound, waiting for the wind to take him out on his voyage of discovery into the unknown west. After a while it seemed to her that the whole night

was waiting, too, holding its breath. For what? Perhaps for an armada sailing up the channel from Spain, or waiting, like Merryyn at Dartmouth, for those who would never come back. Or perhaps, like Trevennor, just waiting for the morning.

## Chapter 12

### THEY SAILED WITH THE WIND

ON Monday morning Sir Humphrey Gilbert's fleet was still riding in the Sound. While Venetia was in Merryn's room helping her dress, a page came to the door with a note from Mr. Denny.

'He says it is all arranged with General Gilbert,' said Merryn, when she had read it through. 'Sir John and Ned Denny, Margaret and I are invited to dine to-day in the *Delight*, and a boat will be at Mill Bay at two o'clock to take the rest of you on board. Sir Humphrey says we must not delay our visit too late as they may move round into Cawson Bay towards evening.'

Venetia did not know how she would get through the long morning. Yesterday had seemed long enough, goodness knows! It was arranged that Michael Erisey should return to Mount Edgcumbe directly the others went out to the ship, and fetch the children, to bring them to Mill Bay by two. Edward and Elizabeth Edgcumbe, two of the younger members of the family, were going with Venetia and Perry, as the older children and Sir Piers and his lady had already visited the fleet several times.

To fill in that endless forenoon, Venetia and Perry went riding in the park with Elizabeth, John and Andrew, the youngest Edgcumbe boys. A Gentleman Usher came with them—the Edgcumbe children did not enjoy quite the happy-go-lucky freedom of the young Trehernes.

They rode along a bridle-road behind the house, through a deeply wooded coombe and out on to an open

hillside covered with gorse and bracken. Here stood a little disused chapel, looking over the Sound.

'May we show them the view, Mr. Luttrell, from the big window up the steps?' asked John Edgcumbe.

Mr. Luttrell expressing himself willing and the groom being called to take the horses, John led the way into the doorway of the chapel and up the winding stone stair. The other two children, Bess and Andrew, had wanted to come too but were told it was crowded enough already in there with three.

They came to the tall Gothic window, opening on the north and east in the form of a bow, with a wide stone sill where one could sit.

'There you see the whole view,' said John, 'from Anthony woods right round to the Mew Stone off Gara Point. The Hoe, Mount Batten and the Barbican down under, and St. Nicholas' Isle, which some want to call Drake's Island. We are allowed to sail below here with the fishing boats sometimes, when they haul in the catch of an evening.'

There was a keen little breeze up here, coming from the south-west and bringing in the rainclouds. Venetia sat quietly by the window while Perry and John explored the chapel. She looked at Sir Humphrey's ships swinging at anchor close below, very small and fragile in the immensity of the Sound. Yesterday morning in church they had repeated the psalm of all mariners:

'They that go down to the sea in ships: and occupy their business in great waters;

These men see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.'

The voices in unison had risen, like a surging tide, as they chanted on:



'For at his word the stormy wind ariseth, which lifteth up the waves thereof;

They are carried up to the heaven, and down again to the deep: their soul melteth away because of the trouble.

They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.

So when they cry unto the Lord in their trouble: he delivereth them out of their distress.'

A cloud moved away from the sun and the golden light came dancing from Gara headland over the water and crept up the slope of Mount Edgcumbe to the window where Venetia was sitting.

'For he maketh the storm to cease: so that the waves thereof are still.

Then are they glad, because they are at rest: and so he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be.

Perry called to her from below. Mr. Luttrell would be growing restive. Venetia went down to the others.

Michael Erisey returned, true to his promise, and snatched a hasty dinner before starting back with the four of them. Venetia wore a cream-coloured dress with flowers worked on it in bright silks, and a little embroidered cap on her hair. It was rather a grown-up dress, with a French farthingale in the new style, very stiff and sedate.

They reached Mill Bay just before two o'clock and there, to their immense relief, was a long boat waiting for them. For the first time Venetia began to have doubts about the suitability of her dress and farthingale. The boat kept bobbing up and down and little spurts of water shot up between it and the jetty. 'Tide's turning,' explained one of the seamen.

'Here,' cried Michael Erisey, 'we can't dance a

measure on the quayside all day for you, my lady. Catch her, master!' and he seized Venetia round the waist and swung her like a package into the seaman's arms.

Before she had time to protest, he served Bess Edgcumbe the same way. The boys and all the mariners were highly amused and there was nothing for it but to swallow one's injured dignity and pretend to laugh as well.

The boat went swiftly through the water, propelled by eight strong oars. The tide was running merrily and they shipped two small seas. 'Heigh-ho for the cream dress!' thought Venetia, but she was too excited to care, and the stinging salt on her lips was pleasant. It was quite different seeing the Hoe and the Sound from water-level. To the right rose the slopes of Mount Edgcumbe, with the little chapel where she had sat an hour or two ago, and the house showing above the trees.

'When I were a lad there weren't no house over to Mount Edgcumbe,' said the coxswain to Michael.

('That is reasonable enough,' said Ned Edgcumbe, ' 'twas only built in Grandfather's time.')

They were close to the fleet now. The first ship was the *Golden Hind*. They passed under the light oak of her bows.

'Is she Drake's ship?' asked Perry, agog.

'That is at Deptford, stupid!' said Venetia. 'Mrs. Fane went over it one day.'

'Not *it*, *her*!'

'Very well, have the last word!'

'Mortimers!' said Mr. Erisey warningly.

They passed the *Swallow*, and a very little vessel, the *Squirrel*, and then they were alongside the Admiral, the *Delight*.

'Where's Mr. Raleigh's ship?' asked Venetia.

'She lies to starboard, further out,' said the leading

seaman. 'She's a passing great ship, the Vice-Admiral—they say she cost Master Raleigh two thousand pounds. I hear he was aboard her to-day, though we all thought him in London. Avast pulling! Make fast forrard!'

'Aye, aye.'

'Now shall I leg you aboard, little lady?'

'No!' cried Venetia, fiercely resolved. She seized the rope ladder and started to scramble up. She trod on her skirt and the rope rungs swung and gave beneath her, and the wales of the ship bulged out towards her. She felt like a fly on the wall and Lord knows what sights the seamen could see from below! But she struggled to the top and pitched over the rail, farthingale and all, into an officer's friendly arms, as trumpets sounded and drums rolled.

They were all assembled to meet them, the General, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and the captain of the *Delight*, William Winter, Lady Gilbert, Sir John and Christo, Merryn, Margaret and Ned Denny, and many other gentlemen. It was amusing to watch the rest of the party come up. Elizabeth made a lady-like, if less courageous, arrival under the auspices of the coxswain; Perry forgot to salute and then did a very hurried and self-conscious one; Edward tried to look as if he had done this so often that it all came as second nature, but succeeded in looking very young; only Michael Erisey came over the rail with the easy grace of an athlete and saluted gravely and naturally. The trumpets and drums went on sounding until they were all on deck.

'Why, Michael Erisey, as I live!' cried Captain Winter. 'The last time I saw you you were a scrubby young adventurer.'

'A young adventurer, Captain, but surely never scrubby!'

'General, we sailed together, Mick and I! This deserves at least one toast!' and he swept Mr. Erisey below.

Every one was in high spirits. Sir Humphrey had given them a wonderful dinner and the world was a magnificent place. Only the two women of the party were sad, and they did their best to hide it.

They were presented to the General. He was a handsome man in the early forties, with dark wavy hair and a pointed beard. His grey eyes were keen and fearless; there was a hint of quick temper in his mouth but he looked a man of great purpose who knew well how to laugh with his friends.

'I am conducting Mrs. Treherne round the sights,' he said, 'with Ned Denny trying to trip my words at every turn. If you all care to follow along—Sweetapple, you might rout out the May-day conceits we are taking for our own entertainment and that of the savages, to show our young guests.'

'Aye, aye, General,' said Sweetapple with a grin.

The children joined in at the tail of the procession, but Gilbert would have none of it—he called them up to the front so that they could see and hear everything. They held the whipstaff, which connected with the tiller below decks and steered the ship. They studied the charts of the coast and stood close under the mainmast, gaping upwards into a forest of ropes and spars. Perry and Ned Edgcumbe clambered some way up the shrouds and Perry screamed down,

'You look like a bell from up here, Venetia, with that stiff skirt around you!'

They met a Hungarian gentleman called Budas, or some such name, who was a poet and very learned, because Ned Denny told them he was coming on the voyage to write a record afterwards, in the Latin tongue,



of all that happened. They saw a man from Saxony who could refine gold. And they saw the Arms of England, richly engraved in lead, which Gilbert was taking to plant in a new English colony when he had taken it for the Queen.

Then they followed Sir Humphrey down below to his cabin. The ship was painted all red within, very new and gay, even to the lids of the gun ports, except for the General's cabin which was panelled in light oak. It had windows along one side of it, giving on to a little narrow gallery. The children went out on this at once and found they were at the stern of the ship, overhanging the water.

'Here I can stroll in privacy of an evening,' said General Gilbert, leaning on the rail, 'as long as the weather is fair, but you feel the movement with a sea running.'

Venetia looked down at the shining, slapping water beneath her and fancied herself, like the General, strolling there of an evening under the stars of the far west.

He took them in again and, from among books, charts and neat files of notes, drew out his parting present from the Queen herself, a medallion showing an anchor guided by a lady. And with it, the royal charter for his voyage, an imposing parchment stamped with the Great Seal of England.

'It permits me as follows——' said Sir Humphrey, and read out: '“To discover, find, search out and view such remote, heathen and barbarous lands not actually possessed by a Christian prince or people . . . the same to have, hold, occupy and enjoy for ever with all commodities, jurisdiction, and royalties both by sea and land.”'

'Is that the same patent you held in 'seventy-eight?' asked Merryn.

'The very same, with only one more summer to go. It

expires early next year and it cost me trouble enough to come by!’

‘That was the whole difficulty,’ said Lady Gilbert to Merryn, as her husband and the other men moved to the door, ‘we were running a race with Time. My husband has put all we have in the world into this voyage. At one time we were selling the very clothes off our backs to fit it out. Of course, it is thanks to Walter and his influence at Court that we are ready to sail at all.’

‘Do you think it promises well, Lady Gilbert?’

‘They say so. My husband has high hopes of success, but he is ever of a hopeful turn of mind.’

On the upper deck again they found Sweetapple waiting for them. The seamen had brought out, for the children’s benefit, the toys they were taking with them to amuse the savages. There were jester’s bells and Morris dance costumes, and a stuffed bear, and, in the midst of it all, a hobby-horse like a big black drum with a nodding head.

Michael Erisey, who had just come up from drinking to old times with Captain Winter, let out one wild whoop and leapt towards it.

‘Christo!’ he shouted, ‘come and do your piece!’

And in a moment he was prancing round the deck inside the hobby-horse. Christo seized a fool’s bladder and began to dance to him, with lively, practised steps, and broke into the *Padstow May Song*. Sir John joined in lustily and the mariners beat time:

‘The young men of Padstow they might if they would,  
For summer is a come unto day,  
They might have built a tall ship and gilded her with gold,  
In the merry morning of May.’

Oh, it was a marvellous mad and merry afternoon! But the sun was moving over and when they had stopped

laughing, and Michael had emerged, hot and dishevelled, from under the hobby-horse, they were aware of a rising breeze.

'I think we will put round the point to Cawson,' said Gilbert to Captain Winter, 'to stand by for our wind.' He was struck by a sudden thought and turned to Sir John.

'You all come from Mount Edgcumbe, I understand. Why not sail round to Cawson with us? I'll send you ashore from the roads, closer to the house than from here.'

'It is mighty kind of you,' roared Sir John, 'but we are too many.'

'The more the merrier,' said Sir Humphrey. 'It is as you please. My wife is staying aboard.'

'Oh God, make him say yes!' prayed Venetia fervently.

'Well, it is indeed most kind of you, sir——' said Sir John Treherne. 'If Mr. Denny is agreeable——'

In that manner Venetia and Peregrine sailed with Sir Humphrey Gilbert's fleet from Plymouth Sound.

They heard the boatswain piping the crew aloft and the rush of bare feet to the shrouds. They watched the canvas unfurling slowly above their heads, flapping and then filling like great clouds, with the cross of St. George and the Admiral's banner fluttering at the mastheads. The anchor was weighed, the cornets and trumpets sounded a fanfare, and silently, gloriously, the *Delight* gathered way. St. Nicholas' Island fell astern, the green woods of Mount Edgcumbe slid past on the starboard bow. Following in their wake came the *Barque Raleigh*, a big and beautiful ship; the *Golden Hind*, the *Swallow* and the *Squirrel* fell into their station in rear.

Venetia and Perry went forward with Michael Erisey into the bows, where they found Merryn. She was looking seawards, her hair blown back by the wind and her blue dress whipping around her knees, like a figurehead. But

Venetia knew she was here neither in space nor time but living in the past, perhaps seeing herself on the shore waving good-bye, transformed in spirit into the mind of her Peter when he sailed with Gilbert five years ago. She did not notice the children who stood quite close to her, and though Michael Erisey leant beside her on the rail until they had cleared the Sound, Merryn never moved nor spoke to him once.

But it was impossible not to feel the spirit abroad in that ship. It was everywhere, the men singing as they worked, the gentlemen laughing and talking on the quarterdeck, the General himself, with his hand on his wife's shoulder, looking up into the sails and saying joyfully:

'This is the day we have lived for, my love, all these long years.'

'A-roving, a-roving [the crew sang], Since roving's been my ru-i-in,

I'll go no more a-roving with you, fair maid.'

It was over all too soon. The anchor went down in Cawson Bay, the boat was alongside and it was time to go ashore.

'My lady wife will be following later,' said Gilbert. 'To-night it is her privilege to sup alone and in state with the General.'

They said good-bye on the quarterdeck and once again the trumpets and the drums saluted them. Venetia and Merryn were the last to descend into Mr. Erisey's waiting arms. Their parting view was Sir Humphrey smiling among his officers, and his wife on his arm smiling too, but it must have cost her sore anguish to find that brave smile.

There was company to supper that evening at Mount



Edgcumbe—the Carews from Anthony House up the river, some Courtenays and, out of the blue, Mr. Walter Raleigh. As first cousin to Ned Denny and a somewhat more distant cousin of the Edgcumbes, the house was always open to him. Venetia was not even surprised to learn that Raleigh was also a vague cousin to Sir John Treherne; she was beginning to realize that all gentlemen in Devon and Cornwall were somehow related to each other!

Raleigh had come down unexpectedly from London to see to some last business on board his ship, and he had been in the *Delight* to say farewell to his half-brother early in the day. He was riding back to London the following morning.

It was quite a shock to Venetia to see him again, sitting beside Lady Edgcumbe, cool and handsome, magnificently dressed, with the rings flashing on his fingers. He had risen in power since she had seen him last—he had just received from a careful sovereign the wine monopoly, which amounted to one to two thousand pounds each year. Venetia listened to that clear, high-pitched voice and realized with surprise that, down here in the west, his accent went unnoticed. Once, while she was gazing at him, he looked her way, and those brilliant blue eyes met hers squarely with no flicker of recognition.

There was much conversation at table. Sir John and his host discussed home defence again, interspersed with laments from Sir Piers over the regrettable pirates of Cawson Bay. There was talk of Gilbert's voyage, of course, and Raleigh spoke of the new Naval Commission, which seemed to be spinning himself and Drake all around England. Then he and Ned Denny started to talk of Ireland and the wars. With Denny, Raleigh was at his most natural, and Venetia, for the first time, realized the

depth of his fascination. It was not only an outward pleasing but a driving power of intellect behind it. He had been thus with Philip Sidney and her father that evening, when he had spoken of Manoa. It was strange he had forgotten that evening so soon, when it was so often uppermost in her own mind.

The open windows giving on to the water called them out at last, and they wandered along the terrace, looking down on the sails of the fishing boats close in to the shore. Only now there was no fleet lying under St. Nicholas' Island. Wine and salted almonds were carried round by the servants and the neighbours foregathered in twos and threes. It was very pleasant, and very peaceful, and very ordinary.

Merryn came along the terrace towards Venetia, with Mr. Raleigh and Ned Denny.

'I know you have already met Mistress Venetia Mortimer, Mr. Raleigh,' she said.

Raleigh looked at her, for a moment blankly, then appeared startled.

'—Mortimer! I never knew you. It was your birthday when we last met, was it not?'

'Yes, Mr. Raleigh. You each went westward with a tall ship, do you remember?'

'I remember it all. I visited your father only last week. He was well and studying hard. . . . What are you doing at Mount Edgcumbe?'

'My brother and I are staying with Sir John Treherne at Pendellion, sir. I wait upon Mrs. Merryn Treherne.'

'Ah,' said Raleigh, 'ah, I see.'

Now what does he see? thought Venetia. But he had already turned to Ned Denny again and was talking of Smerwick's surrender.

'It has been a long day,' said Merryn gently. 'Would it

be wise to go to bed, Venetia? I have the headache so will soon be following you.'

'I'm so sorry, madam. Can I fetch you anything?'

'No, Venetia. I think I would rather be alone. And there is no need for you to wake early in the morning; we are going into Plymouth again, to-morrow being our last day, and the maid can well manage. Good night, dear child.'

When Venetia opened her window that night to look at the weather, the wind blew into her room, snatching at the curtains, and it came from the south-east—Sir Humphrey's wind. She missed seeing the lanterns of his fleet under St. Nicholas' Island. It had been a day in a thousand—a day she could never forget. But, somehow, Venetia wished Mr. Raleigh had not come to Mount Edgcumbe to-night. His presence gave her a vague foreboding. Perhaps, after that night at Mortimer House, he would always strike uneasiness into her, and mar her complete happiness.

She heard footsteps below and, looking down, she saw Walter Raleigh pacing the terrace. He came to a stop under her window and stood there motionless, bareheaded in the windy moonlight, looking at the stars and the night.

Venetia had just finished her breakfast next morning when there was a clatter at the door and Perry, John Edgcumbe and Bess stood on the threshold.

'Quickly!' gasped Perry, 'Gilbert's fleet—they're weighing anchor. We may yet be there in time!'

She ran downstairs with them, waiting for neither cloak nor hat.

'Go softly,' cautioned John, 'somebody might try to stop us!'

Horses were ready saddled for them in the court. They

rode quietly round to the back of the house and then broke into a gallop. They raced through the wooded coombe and up over the slope, past the chapel, setting a herd of fallow-deer to flight.

'One of the grooms—riding down from Maker——' shouted John between jolts, 'saw them hoisting sail.'

They swung down again into tall beech-woods. It was warm and fine with a soft gale coming across the Sound that set the shadows tossing under the trees. Cantering on round the point, they came out of the wind into stunted moss-grown oaks. The sea lay close below them and that dank airless place was full of the quiet sound of the tide—a very different echo to the roar of the Atlantic below Pendellion.

Perhaps fifteen minutes from their arrival at Venetia's door, they came to the edge of the trees and a fair view, over gorse and bracken, across Cawson Bay. Ned Denny and Margaret were there before them and the horses cried out to each other.

'It is you, is it!' said Margaret to her family.

'You are just in time,' said Ned Denny, '*Delight* will be rounding Penlee Point in a minute now. There's a beautiful wind to run them round the Lizard.'

They all stood watching in silence, the horses still blown from their gallop. The *Delight* was well ahead, her St. George's cross streaming aloft, heeling over kindly to the wind. She was *their* ship, who had sailed in her only yesterday. Some lengths behind came the low lovely lines of the *Barque Raleigh*. They looked like two great swans, with their brood, the three lesser ships, following behind.

'The *Squirrel* is so very small,' said Margaret, 'one wonders she could live in any sea.'

'She is barely more than a pinnace,' said Ned. 'Well, good luck to them all, and good fortune!'



They watched them out of sight round the headland. First the *Delight*, then the *Barque Raleigh*, the *Golden Hind*, the *Swallow* and the little *Squirrel*. They had gone. Cawson Bay was empty.

It was Tuesday, the 11th of June, 1583.

Ned Denny turned his head slowly, lost, unhappy,



‘GOOD LUCK TO THEM ALL, AND GOOD FORTUNE!’

bewildered. Margaret’s eyes met his and held them. No word was spoken, but when they all turned back into the trees he and Margaret took a bridle-path that led away uphill. Venetia was riding behind the others and saw them go, but she did not draw attention to them because she felt that they wanted, this once, to be alone together.

There was a storm that night. The following morning they were due to ride back into Cornwall, to Pendellion, and it would be a hard day, but Venetia could not sleep.

She lay there listening to the rolling echoes of the thunder and the mad drumming of rain on the roof. There was a gutter outside that poured water in a cascade on to the terrace and the wind blew mightily, shaking the house as a dog might shake a hare. Usually on such a night, Venetia would have burrowed down in her great warm bed and drowsed off to sleep, snug and secure, but to-night was not usual. There was a malignant Evil abroad in the wind. She could only lie thinking and thinking of Gilbert and his fleet, riding it out grimly in a wild waste of waters, in the chaos of night and storm.

## Chapter 13

### THE SILVER FLAGON

PENDELLION again! How good it was to be back! All the way from Bodmin Venetia had been thinking of it and of Trevennor, and Joyous Gard, and the Fellowship. And here they were standing in the great hall just as if they had never been away, with Rowland Mundy walking in from a side door with a roll of papers under his arm, and *Just* stretched out on the rushes, and a voice shouting along the passage—

‘Custance is as sweet as honey,  
Custance is as sweet as honey,  
I her lamb and she my coney  
We mun be married a Sunday.’

‘Venn!’ shouted Venetia.

‘Hello,’ said Venn, ‘so you are back at last!’

There was so much to tell him it was hard to know where to begin. Venetia walked him all round the garden, talking twenty to the dozen, over the bowling lawn and up the pleached alley to the fountain, and back past the statue of the dancing faun and Lady Treherne’s gillyflowers on to the terrace. Venn listened intently but she was rather disappointed that he asked no questions. At last her recital petered out.

‘Well?’ she said. ‘What of you? Have you been to Joyous Gard?’

‘What was the use in going there with you and Christo away? Did you expect me to tread pavaues around the Round Table with Thomasine?’

‘No,’ said Venetia, hurt.

'Every thing is just the same here. I have been rabbiting. We took the young hounds to exercise and swam them over the river before the weather broke.'

'With your clothes on?'

'We took them off, of course. To-morrow I'm going out fishing with old Rowe in his boat.'

'Oh. I thought we might go together—to Joyous Gard or Barbary Gutter.'

'Sorry. I didn't know when you were a-coming back. I settled it with Rowe.'

Venetia stared out at the clipped yews on the lawn, her elbows on the balustrade of the terrace, until the yews began to marshal themselves into blurry sort of ranks and she knew her eyes were filling with tears. She must not let Venn see he had made her cry, just about nothing. She went on staring miserably into the garden.

'Well——' said Venn, his face still saturnine, 'I must change. See you at supper.'

Somehow the return had lost its glamour. She realized how, all the way home, she had been framing the words to tell Trevennor, to let him share the glorious fun of that day in the *Delight*, when Michael Erisey had danced inside the hobby-horse, and they had sailed round to Cawson Bay; to describe Ned Denny with his gay laugh and red hair, and Frankie Drake (or the man whom they were sure must have been Frankie Drake!), and Walter Raleigh pacing the terrace under the stars. But now Venn was like a stranger, hard and cold, and he did not seem even interested in what she had done at Plymouth.

Next day was windy and inclined to be wet—that storm had broken the fine spell. The children began lessons again, which was dreary, and directly after dinner, Venn disappeared. Venetia was at a loss. She looked into the long gallery and saw Merryn and Lady Treherne and



Mistress Bassett and Thomasine sewing by the fire, and the sight filled her with such sudden distaste that she sent down to have *Grey Mortimer* saddled and went to change into her riding breeches.

'Surely, Mistress Venetia, you wouldn't be a-riding on an afternoon like this!' exclaimed Patience. 'They tell me 'tis blowing a high old gale on the cliffs.'

'I'm riding inland,' said Venetia. 'You need not tell anyone I am out.'

'Horrible this war talk, is it not?' said Patience as she helped Venetia into her boots. 'Master Jewell tells me they are taking up with the drilling strict now. His centon has been mustered twice in one month.'

'Is Jewell a keen soldier?'

'Very keen, he is. He was called out by Sir John to exercise in front of the whole centon the last time, as an example of prompt pike-work.'

'Now what is Patience about, getting so thick with Jewell?' wondered Venetia, remembering Meliagraunce's Julian and what Venn had told her about the moonlight courting. She wanted to warn her dear Patience to keep clear of men like Rob Jewell, but it was none of her business to poke into her maid's concerns. She decided to ask Venn if he had heard any more gossip, then remembered that she and Venn were not on their old terms and went downstairs feeling more unhappy than ever.

The moment she was clear of the yard she turned *Grey Mortimer's* head to the woods, towards Joyous Gard. Where else would she go for solace but there? She thought if she saw the house again, and stood in the big dusty room in the silence and held the silver cup that Tristram had handed to her when she took the oath, that she would be comforted and know that his strange mood would pass quickly.

She rode beneath the dripping trees. There were no birds to-day, only on every side the sound of rushing water and the sough of the wind in the high branches overhead. The fine misty rain clung to her horse's ears and stained his coat a darker grey. Venetia wrapped herself close in her cloak and tried to think of cheerful things, like hunting, and the day her father would come out of prison.

She passed through the gate and turned left down the well-known path into the clearing where, last month, there had been wild hyacinths. It looked sad to-day, all wet and no longer with that wonderful blue to glimmer between the grass.

*Grey Mortimer* stopped and shied, putting Venetia's heart into her mouth.

It was Pepa. She stood in the clearing in the same old red skirt with a square of sacking round her slender shoulders. For a moment Venetia doubted that there really was a Pepa. Perhaps she was some spirit of the trees who only appeared to girls when they went riding alone.

But she was real flesh and blood. The moment their eyes met she recognized Venetia and came forward, smiling. She had not smiled the last time. She came up and laid her hand on the horse's neck.

'Wet,' she said, with a slight foreign inflexion in her voice. Venetia looked down and saw that that face was like a painting at Mortimer House, an idolatrous painting of an Italian madonna. The damp mist shone on the long eyelashes and hair, and had brought a rich flush of colour to the golden-brown skin.

And suddenly Venetia knew who Pepa should be—not the Queen of Elland, nor an Italian madonna, but Guinevere, Guinevere who was King Arthur's Queen, whom Sir Launcelot loved as his own soul. Thomasine's

foolish curtsy and giggling had been a mummary, because it was Pepa the gipsy who should have drunk of the silver flagon in Joyous Gard.

'Pepa,' said Venetia, 'will you come with me?'

'Yes,' said Pepa, showing no surprise, and took her stirrup.

They approached the edge of the trees and Venetia dismounted.

'Horse will stand?' asked Pepa.

'Yes, this one will. I want to tie him here.'

Pepa took the reins from her fumbling fingers and tethered *Grey Mortimer* with a neat hitch to a branch.

'Do you know that house?' asked Venetia.

'Lynn.'

'No, Joyous Gard. Do you understand, Pepa. Joyous Gard.'

'Joyous Gar,' repeated Pepa obediently, still with no change of expression.

The house looked very lonely standing among the dripping meadow grass, and Venetia's heart went out to it. She stepped along the path between the wet stalks and Pepa followed her, moving noiselessly with her bare feet. They came to the tower. The water was pouring down the drain-pipe marked '1577' and before they were half-way to the big windows Venetia's riding-boots were wet through.

They came to the window and it gave to Venetia's hand. She scrambled in and held it for Pepa who, for all her wide red skirt, wriggled gracefully and nimbly over the sill.

They stood together in the big room. Pepa drew a deep breath of wonder and looked about her, at the high, beamed ceiling, the winged stag above the fireplace. Standing there rapt, her face turned upwards, the braids

of dark hair hanging to her waist—a child on the verge of womanhood—she looked indeed like Guinevere the king's daughter, the most valiant and fairest lady whom Arthur took to wife.

Venetia went across the room to where the silver flagon stood on its press. The wine they had left in it from the Oath of the Fellowship was still there. As she lifted the cup the heavy oak press tipped forward. It had been kept level by a small wad of paper, folded double, and the paper had come out from under one of the legs. Venetia picked it up, unfolded it, and saw it was a half page torn from a letter and written over in Merryn's hand.

She took up the silver flagon and came back to Pepa.

'To your good health,' she said, '—Guinevere.'

She drank and passed the cup across.

Pepa took it with both hands and bowed gravely, her gold ear-rings swinging. She looked at Venetia over the silver rim as she drank in her turn, and her black eyes were deep as darkness itself.

Venetia took the flagon back to the press where it always stood. Then she went to the central bay of the window and smoothed out the creased half-sheet of paper. It was as if Merryn had started to write a letter and, disliking a sentence, had torn it across and started afresh. Venetia read—

'—tell you Bodrugan has been here again, since I came back, with the same foolish proposals and I fear he is making a strong bid for the property. He intends to bring the old family dispute before the Star-Chamber and that will mean an even more costly fight to retain Lynn, though we must win at the end, but the alternative, you may rest assured, he will not come by. But as it grows unpleasant here alone I am moving to Pendellion——'

Then came the tear. There was no indication to whom she had started writing and no date.



So it *was* Bodruga who had driven Merryn out of her home! Perhaps he, too, wanted to marry her, and failing in that, had pressed on an old claim to the estate. It was that long law-suit ending in the Star-Chamber that had played such havoc with her fortunes. Oh the wicked ruffian, the brute! Venetia was glad he was dead.

She looked round, flushed with her discovery, at the empty room. Empty! Pepa had gone, without a sound, without the creak of a board, the click of a window-latch. She had vanished as if she had never been. It was strange.

Venetia looked across the room and her heart turned over. The silver flagon had vanished with her.

It took her a full moment to recover her wits, to realize that her Guinevere was no king's daughter but a gipsy and a common thief.

Had ever anyone been so foolish as herself! And now, not only had she lost the flagon that had sworn in the Fellowship, that Trevennor had handed her in the sunlight when he named her Isold the Beautiful, but she had lost something that was a part of Joyous Gard, that belonged to Merryn.

It must be retrieved and at once, before Meliagraunce discovered the loss and raised the hue and cry. Almost pitching over in her haste she clambered out of the window, hardly remembering to close it after her, and sped back to the trees with her heart beating a furious tattoo against her ribs. Thank heaven *Grey Mortimer* was still there!—she had had a horrible presentiment he would have vanished like the flagon. She dragged the reins undone and climbed on. The slimy, beautiful, deceitful little jade, to drink from the cup and then steal it!

Venetia turned across the clearing into the trees. She rode blindly. Showers of raindrops fell on her head and

neck, and wet branches slapped her face. When she paused there was no sound, except for the waterfalls and a jay in the woods mocking her.

She pulled herself together. There must be an organized search and she could not go on it alone, with the afternoon already half-spent. Trevennor was her man. He had sworn to be loyal to the Fellowship and now was his chance. She was half-way back to Pendellion before she remembered that he had gone fishing with old Rowe in his boat.

Then she had a moment of blank despair. Christo was with Menhenitt in Allenbridge, buying a hound, and Michael Erisey, a last possible hope, gone up the coast with Sir John for a muster. It would have to be Venn, if she waited for him until dark.

When she got in, Venetia told the groom to feed *Grey Mortimer* but keep him saddled. *Roister* was in the stable and she ordered him to be prepared. Then she went indoors and wrote a note which one of the servants took to Trevennor's room.

'Tristram,' she scribbled hurriedly, 'something grave has occurred concerning the Fellowship. You must help me. Isold.'

It was all she could do. She went back to her room, took off her boots and dried her stockinged feet at the fire in an agony of impatience.

Venn came sooner than she expected. Her room opened out of a small drawing-room and when she heard him she ran out and met him there. It was odd that when she was in such a fever of haste her first words should be:

'I thought you were fishing with Rowe!'

'No,' said Venn moodily. 'It was cried off this morning, the weather was too bad. I was walking with the dogs in Barbary Gutter. What is the matter?'

'Venn, it's important! There is a gipsy girl I knew—I

met her in the woods. I took her into Joyous Gard with me to-day and she has stolen the silver flagon. We must find her quickly!

Lord! how hopelessly silly it sounded—fool, fool that she was! Now Trevennor had some reason to be angry with her.

But he didn't seem to be. He considered a minute.

'How long ago did it happen?'

'Nearly an hour now.'

'Good. We must ride after them. Are the horses ready?'

'Yes, Venn.'

'I'll take a little food. Tell your maid you will be eating your supper out—at the farm, anywhere. I'll meet you in the yard.'

This was the meaning of loyalty!

What Patience thought, Venetia neither knew nor cared. When she got down to the yard Venn was already in the saddle. It was fortunate that Sir John and Mr. Erisey were both out; they were not expected back till late, the grooms said.

To Venetia's surprise, instead of going down into the woods, Trevennor rode round the house and up the hill behind.

'One of the men saw them,' he explained. 'Two men and a girl with a pony cart, heading towards Trevarian and St. Elid.'

They rode up into the driving rain. For all that it was June, the evening promised to close in early and it would be a wild night.

'Venn,' said Venetia, 'I am glad you are here.'

Venn looked at her.

'You dear foolish little red-head—I am sorry about yesterday.'

'It didn't matter.'

'It did. I made you cry. I was so vilely jealous I suppose. When you started telling me of sailing to Cawson I was so sick with envy I could have wept.'

'Oh Venn, I never thought of that.'

'I know. That's why I was so vile. I hated myself all day to-day, particularly in Barbary Gutter.'

'If you had come to Joyous Gard I couldn't have been such a fool and we would never have lost the flagon.'

'I'm glad we have.'

'Oh, Venn, why?'

'Because it is good to be on an adventure together.' And Venn laughed happily, his hair all wet and wild on his forehead, and sang with no lack of reverence:

'When Jesus went to Jairus' house  
Whose daughter was about to die,  
He turned the minstrels out of doors  
With all the rascal company.  
Beggars they are, with one consent,  
And rogues, by Act of Parliament.'

Who would have thought three months ago that Venetia Mortimer would rejoice in riding out on the windy cliffs in a thin mizzle of rain, in a mad search for vagabonds! No one on earth, thought Venetia, and her heart sang.

They turned along the ridge towards Allenbridge Highway, putting the wind behind them, and broke into a canter. They came to a cross-road and pulled up, non-plussed, but only for a moment.

'Look, tracks of a cart,' cried Venn excitedly, 'and travelling at a rare pace because it swung out on the turn.'

They went downhill into the woods at a fast trot and soon saw Mr. Digory Joliffe's chimneys through the trees.

'If it were not so wet,' said Venn savagely, 'I'd have



pleasure in setting a light to his trees and burning his whole plaguy wood down!—Tell me more about your gipsy, Venetia.'

She told him, and very foolish it sounded. But somehow not so wildly improbable out under the wet trees as it might have done at home.

They rode on steadily through the rain, along the valley and up the opposite hill, cantering on when the going was good and trotting on the steep gradients. For all the cold wet wind it was steamy down in the woods.

They came to a muddy patch and there were no cart tracks.

'They must have taken the other road at the fork,' said Venn, and they hurried back and turned to the left, uphill again, a long steep climb with St. Elid church tower ahead of them and the Atlantic lost in the mist somewhere to the right. As they mounted they came into the gale.

'You look like one of the Furies, with your red hair streeling out!' cried Venn.

'I am the spirit of vengeance!' Venetia shouted back. 'What shall we do when we find them?'

'Got to find 'em first,' said Venn.

St. Elid church clock struck six as they rode past. There was an old shepherd with his dog, unlatching his cottage gate hard by the church.

'Have you met any gipsies on the road?' called Venn, reining in.

The shepherd stared stonily.

Venn repeated the question slowly but the old man shook his head.

'Wish I knew more Cornish!' muttered Venn, delving into his memory for phrases that Joanna had once taught him. The shepherd shouted and a woman came out of the house, small and wizened, her loose wisps of hair blowing.

'Have you seen any gipsies?' Venn asked impatiently, for the third time.

' 'Tis Master Trevennor from Pendellion! I wur nursreymaid to your father. Forgive the good man, he has



'HAVE YOU SEEN ANY GIPSIES?' VENN ASKED IMPATIENTLY  
no learning! I see some Egyptians pass with a wagon  
while I wur cooking supper.'

'When, tell me when!'

'Quarter-hour gone, Master Trevennor. Along the  
top——'

But Venn, with a shout of thanks, was already spurring on and *Grey Mortimer* after him. They rode along the ridge towards the sea. On a clearer evening there would be a fine view from this road, far over the Camel Estuary and Padstow haven towards the tin-mining moors eastward. But the weather drew a veil over everything. They could see the screens of rain blowing across the lower ground, sweeping in from the coast.

They pulled up again, staring down. It was a big country, big enough to swallow up three gipsies.

'Venetia,' said Venn very quietly, 'smoke. Look, down in the trees under the slope.'

'What of it?'

'That is no chimney smoke. Wouldn't they be wet? Wouldn't they light a fire to dry their clothes and cook their supper by?'

They would, they would! With thumping heart Venetia followed him down the hill. Half-way down a ride—what Venn called a 'trench'—turned off the road into the undergrowth. They rode along it more slowly, the horses' hoofs slapping into the mud. A cart had been along here; some of the tracks were only just filling with water.

Round a corner they came on them, a forlorn little huddle against a bank. The cart tipped up, shafts skywards and an ancient man sat in its shelter. The fire was already lit; a young gipsy with his back towards them was feeding it with sticks, which were damp and sizzled. The girl held a cooking-pot. She looked up and saw Venetia and Venn sitting there on their muddy horses, watching them.

For an instant she stood. Then she spoke quickly to the man and he swung round. He was very dark, flashily handsome, gipsy fashion, with heavy ear-rings and fine white teeth. The girl put down her cooking-pot and went over to the cart, where the old man groused at her for

disturbing him. Each move she made was slow and graceful and queenly.

‘She has the flagon!’ exclaimed Venn, starting forward.

‘Stay where you are!’ whispered Venetia sharply.

The girl who was Guinevere came towards them with the silver flagon in her hand. The young man leapt to his feet and spoke to her rapidly in the same strange tongue, not Cornish but something more harsh and alien, but whatever it was he said she turned gently aside and came on. She walked past Venn and *Roister* as if they were not there, straight up to Venetia, put one small hand on *Grey Mortimer’s* neck and held out the flagon.

‘Thank you,’ said Venetia politely.

She looked down into those dark, faun’s eyes, no longer feeling angry, only curious.

‘Who are those?’ she said, looking at the men.

‘My father,’ said Pepa, ‘and he, my man.’

She went back to the young gipsy, took up the pot and placed it on the fire. They left them there under the bank, in the desolate evening.

‘What a strange girl,’ said Venn uneasily, as they struck the road. ‘I think she was a witch.’

(For to-night I’ll sleep in a cold open field [so ran the song]  
Along with the raggle-taggle gipsies-O.)

Whatever she was—witch or madonna, king’s daughter or common thief—Venetia never saw Pepa again.



## Chapter 14

### THE BEACON

IT was a bad June, much rain and the wind blowing almost incessantly. But in between there were fine days and on one of these, about a week after the flagon affair, Venetia was out on the bowling lawn and saw Christo and Michael Erisey going past with a caliver. Firing with the musket was the new fashion; for the moment it had quite ousted archery with the young men and they had rigged up a target the size of a man in the butts on the hill. Powder was always short but Michael had been to Bude Haven the day before and had come by an extra supply. Sir John had arranged a firing competition at Allenbridge for three centons the following week and his two officers felt in need of serious practice.

'Can I come too?' asked Venetia.

'Yes, indeed, if you keep quiet,' said Christo.

She trailed out with them to the slope beyond the garden. The target in the butts was a sorry imitation of a man but he had a head and a big expanse where the heart should be.

'You start, Michael. Only five rounds, remember!'

Michael Erisey raised his caliver and fired his five, while Venetia sat on the grass behind, hardly daring to breathe and trying to steel herself not to blink at each bang.

'Two in the head, one through the jaw, one grazing the shoulder, one wide,' sang Christo, inspecting the target.

'That was when she jammed,' said Michael. 'Poor. Now you, Sir Christo——'

Christo fired all on the target, three through the head and the last two through the heart.

'Very dead man,' said Erisey, 'and all clean on the mark. You're shooting well. If you keep that up you will win the prize with ease.'

Christo sat down on the grass and laid the caliver to cool.

'I would like to beat Digory Joliffe, if no one else! Michael, tell Venetia what you heard over to Bude—about Raleigh's ship.'

'That was most strange,' said Michael. 'Do you remember the *Barque Raleigh*, that is Mr. Raleigh's ship, Venetia, she that sailed with Gilbert?'

'The Vice-Admiral. What of her?'

'She put about after two days and returned to Plymouth. They say she had plague aboard, but it seems odd to forsake an enterprise so lightly.'

'But, Michael, she was the biggest ship in the fleet! That seaman said she cost two thousand pounds to build.'

'That is just what the spiteful tongues are whispering—that Raleigh never meant her to go far because he believes Gilbert's luck is out. They say that the talk of him ever going himself was a mere boast.'

'I don't believe it,' said Christo. 'There are too many men out to blacken Walter Raleigh's good name.'

'And Sir Humphrey is his own half-brother,' said Venetia hotly. 'Why he helped him to the whole enterprise, and I know Mr. Raleigh wanted to go himself because he told my father so in London.'

'I take no account of those rumours either,' said Michael. 'No doubt the captain of the *Barque* got short shrift from the owner when he came sailing home. But it is hard for General Gilbert to lose his best ship two days

out of port. Carry on, Christo, a score rapid, and don't let her jam.'

Venetia sat on the grass while Christo fired his quick shots in succession, and the bitter tang of the powder went down her throat. She thought of the *Barque Raleigh*, that was the finest ship in Gilbert's fleet, bigger and better furnished than the *Delight*. It was wicked of men to slander Mr. Raleigh so. Hearing his voice when he spoke of plantation in the west, of a new empire for the Queen better than the King of Spain's, no one could doubt his passionate sincerity. And yet—could he have thought the danger of invasion closer at hand than they realized, and planned by this means to keep the newest and fastest ship closer to English shores? Venetia saw again Mount Edgumbe terrace in the bright windy moonlight, and Walter Raleigh, bareheaded under her window, staring abroad into the night.

Christo won the shooting match at Allenbridge and came back with a fine new musket of gilt and walnut wood, of which he was very proud, not only because he had won it for himself but also because he had brought honour to his centon, or company. All the villages around, from St. Nunn on the north to Trevarian and St. Elid to the south, shared in his victory.

Midsummer passed and July came in, with life running along very pleasantly and nothing out of the way, either good or bad, to break the smooth tenor of it. The Fellowship continued to meet in Joyous Gard and the silver flagon stood placidly in the corner on its press. Venetia showed Venn the letter she had found and he said crushingly that that was no news, he had known it all along. Of course, Bodrugan had wanted to marry Merryn, every one did. He made her burn the half-sheet, saying it was no part

of the Fellowship to play Peeping Tom, and they put a wooden slat under the leg of the press to keep it steady.

Marvellous to relate, with all their comings and goings, Meliagraunce still seemed unaware of it all. His shrewish wife, they discovered, kept indoors with a chronic stiffness in the joints. Venn tackled Rob Jewell one day on Julian, but he shut up like a clam. Only once, when Patience was chattering to Venetia, Nurse being out, she mentioned Julian the dairymaid.

‘She is the pretty one, is she not?’ said Venetia casually.

‘Pretty enough, but not well thought of! Rob Jewell tells me I should not have much to do with her sort.’

But the window remained unfastened, and that was all that mattered.

One day Mr. Roscarrock came to dinner, not that that was unusual. Master Specott, the vicar of St. Ruan, was also there and the conversation turned on the defence of the west, not that that was unusual either. Venetia was absorbed with a large portion of cherry pie crowned with cream, and hardly listening, when she felt a blow on the shins and Trevennor, opposite her, flickered his long lashes in his father’s direction.

‘All this talk about beacons,’ Sir John was saying, ‘on top of the Council’s order about the musters. Just like their Lordships to expect us to complete a muster of the whole country at such short notice! What do they take us for, recording angels with wings and tablets poised, flitting up and down from Launceston to Land’s End in the wink of an eye?—your pardon, vicar!’

‘And this threatened report on our common-lands and the horse-breeding question,’ said Mr. Roscarrock. ‘Cornwall never was a horse country. Too rough. They certainly seem to have a scare afoot. The trouble is the country has grown slack in the fat years of peace.’



Lady Treherne looked up, her kindly face troubled, and said:

'I know nothing about these things, but it seems to me if only we could live quiet among our neighbours, each nation content in its own estate with a safe future for the children, and not always be striving in the race for territories and fortunes, surely we would do better in the sight of the Lord?'

'Life moves fast these days,' said her husband. 'Those who will not run in the race fall behind and are trampled under. The Queen in her wisdom has given us peace, but she cannot wield more than mortal power and the signs begin to swing war-wards. Have you heard of the beacons, sir?'

(What in the world did Venn find interesting in this conversation, wondered Venetia, puzzled.)

Sir John continued:

'There is talk of keeping the fires manned night and day, fair and foul, all along the coast. There's nothing new there, I know, but they are discussing a system of signalling the size of a fleet by the number of beacons set ablaze.'

'I hear young Mr. Joliffe has the start of them there,' said Master Specott. 'His fears lead him to keep a watcher on Trevarian beacon throughout the hours of darkness, paid from his own pocket.'

'He may be in the right of it, for once!' said Sir John. 'Who knows these days?'

The Vicar was a warlike divine who regularly turned out with the centon and preached them eloquent sermons on the Roman centurion. He continued in his train of thought:

'Besides beacon fires, our church bells still stand as a warning of invasion. It bears out the tradition that the House of God is a rock and a fortress in time of trouble.'

'Where is the beacon site here, Sir John?' asked Michael Erisey.

'Barbary Cliff, my boy, and you should know that!'

'I found the standard of drill in the west country very behind——' said Mr. Roscarrock, alluding to west of Truro, and that started another discussion.

'What was all the kicking about?' Venetia asked Venn when dinner was over.

'I have had an idea. Come to Barbary Gutter and get Perry along, too. I'll bring Peter.'

Knowing her Trevennor, Venetia lost no time, and soon she and the two inseparables, Perry and Peter, met Venn on the cliff close to the stream. Thrift was all over the cliff-edge now, waving rosily against the deep blue sea, and it was hot in the hollow. It reminded Venetia of the day they had first thought of the Fellowship.

'Now,' said Venn, his voice sharp with excitement, 'I have an idea for a mighty fine laugh on them all, but it will vex them a little and may bring us into trouble. Will you accept the risk?'

'Of course,' said Venetia. 'We usually scrape away free—look at the flagon! But at any cost, I will abide the consequences.'

'And I,' chorused Perry and Peter.

'Listen, then, Knights of the Table Round. We are going to raise a mock invasion alarm and turn out the troops in the dark watches of the night. You, Isold, and I will fire the beacon on the cliff, and Sir Dinadan and Sir Kay will raise the alarm by ringing the church bells. Midnight is as good an hour as any.'

'Ooo! Church bells at midnight!' said Sir Kay, with a joyful tremor.

'How do we get in to ring?' asked Perry, called Dinadan.

'I know where the Vicar puts the key. For a great scholar he is very dull—he hides it on the lintel of the door, in the porch.'

'And us, Tristram?' said Venetia.

'We set the fire alight. We had better start some minutes before the others in case it does not catch quickly.'

'When, when shall we do it?'

'Why not to-night?'

The boys capered round, wildly excited. Venetia laughed across at Trevennor.

'Another adventure together. Oh, Tristram of Lyonesse, what rare sport. Could we not have Christo and Henry in too?'

'Not Christo. He is father's personal lieutenant and has taken the Oath of Allegiance to the Queen; it wouldn't be fair even to tell him. Henry would be good, but father would miss him when he calls for his armour. Do you think you can manage the bells alone, you two?'

'Of course we can. You just want a loud noise?'

'That's all.'

This time nobody suggested Thomasine.

They spent most of the afternoon on Barbary Cliff, building up the beacon. The foundation was already laid but they had to stack it high, and to lay in a pile of wood to feed it. Each piece had to be carried from the spinney two fields inland, but luckily it was dry and the weather set fair, with a light wind from the south-east and the clouds very high.

Coming up from the spinney with her last load of sticks, Venetia saw two little figures with legs like pins, and another figure, only a degree less small, scurrying up and down on the skyline. The big black blob beside them was the beacon. She prayed that no one else would see them there and that the beacon would go unnoticed till

dark. But Sir John had not yet felt the danger present enough to furnish his own beacon watch, like Master Digory Joliffe. The good people of St. Ruan went steadily about on their lawful occasions and nobody but an occasional shepherd or fisherman went sea-gazing on the coast, unless it were of a Sunday.

It was too draughty to sit out on the terrace after supper that evening so the younger ones foregathered in the long gallery. After they had amused themselves in various ways, at chess, draughts and primero (the favourite card game at Pendellion), Michael Erisey brought out his lute. He sat down in the window-seat, his hat on the back of his head, his eyes on Merryn as she worked at a great coverlet of cloth of gold.

‘Any suggestion?’ asked Michael.

‘*Greensleeves*,’ said some one.

‘*Barbara Allen’s Cruelty*,’ said Thomasine.

‘Give us a song that gallops to-night,’ said Venn. ‘Why not *Mad Tom o’ Bedlem*?’

‘Oh, please sing that!’ cried Peter.

It was the song of the Abraham-Men, the mad beggars who travelled the roads. The children had all, sometime or another, met a ‘poor Tom’ on the highway—a gaunt, half-naked, sinister figure, who gave them a thrill of terror and came back to them later in dreams.

Michael twanged his strings with a flourish and plunged into the wild rhythm of the opening stanza:

‘From the hag and hungry goblin  
That into rags would rend ye,  
All the spirits that stand  
By the naked man  
In the book of moons, defend ye.’

His voice was clear and strong, a gallant young voice



and good to listen to. As he sang, he tossed his hat across the floor and it landed at Venetia's feet.

'The moon's my constant mistress  
And the lonely owl my marrow;  
The flaming drake  
And the night-crow make  
Me music to my sorrow.

I know more than Apollo,  
For oft when he lies sleeping,  
I see the stars  
At mortal wars  
In the wounded welkin weeping.'

It was nearly dark in the long gallery. The tempo of the song quickened and Venn drummed the beat with his heels.

'With a host of furious fancies,  
Whereof I am commander,  
With a burning spear  
And a horse of air  
To the wilderness I wander.

By a knight of ghosts and shadows  
I summoned am to tourney  
Ten leagues beyond  
The wide world's end—  
Methinks it is no journey.'

Michael was in black outline now against the window. Merryn's gold coverlet shone pale across the room but it was too dark to sew.

'It gallops fast, that song,' said Venn. '—A knight of ghosts and shadows. That's what we all look like sitting around here. Hi, there, *lights!*'

'Lights!' echoed Peter and Perry running to the door. Venetia felt an undercurrent of tension in all three of them.

Servants came, and soon candles were twinkling like stars along the length of the gallery. The 'shadows' took on their real colour and substance. Merryn bent to her needle again, the cloth of gold shimmering around her knees. Venn looked at Venetia and his eyes shone with an unholy gleam. Only two more hours to go!

Just before midnight Venetia was standing in her old breeches and jerkin on the top of Barbary Cliff in the tug of the north-east wind.

The moon was hidden behind the high racing clouds, but it was not dark. She could see the pale glimmer of the surf three hundred feet below her, as the ebb-tide turned, and the white blur on the hill behind where the sheep were penned for the night. And there was still a brightness in the west, the ghost of the sunset.

Venn came back from his tour of inspection.

'All is well,' he said quietly. 'No one has been here. I think the pig-fat will come in useful in this wind—have you the jar safe?'

'I have it here.'

They sat down in the shelter of their beacon to wait for the clock to strike.

'I hope those boys get into church. It is lucky the wind favours us or we might not hear the chime. It must be close on twelve.'

It would be unnerving, down there in the churchyard at the haunted hour. Venetia and Venn sat close together, very still. The dim line of the coast lay below them, the Scar Rock a shadow on the sea. They heard a sheep cry, and the roar of the waves down under, and the sound of the wind blowing across the grass. They heard St. Ruan clock chime drowsily, and then the first stroke of midnight.

Venetia's heart leapt into her mouth. The moment had come!

Venn was furiously scratching at his tinder-box. 'Curse, oh curse it!' he muttered. He made a spark which flickered out. Then another and Venetia put her taper into it, and they had a flame.

'Light the twigs on the sheltered side.'

She held the taper downward until the twigs caught.

'Stand back!' cried Venn, and threw on the jar of pig-fat.

A blue flame shot up, there was a sizzle and a smell, then the wood shifted and the whole beacon went up in a great blaze. The wind caught it and blew the flames seawards, higher and higher, with a roar like the tide on the coast. The whiteness of the night turned black around them and Venn's face in the crimson glare was exultant.

Then from St. Ruan church tower came the clarion call of the bells. Clashing and clanging, a wild discord like many hoofs galloping, they rang out the invasion alarm. Venetia could picture the huge bells swinging in the belfry and the two little figures below, flushed and panting as they hauled at the ropes.

'Pile her up high,' shouted Venn. 'All we have got.'

They dragged up the wood and hurled it on, scratching their hands and the twigs catching in their hair. The heat was like the blast of a furnace and the greedy flames tore the branches from their grasp. Higher still their beacon roared to the stars.

'Look!' cried Venetia, 'Trevarian's lit hers.'

A light had flickered on the cliffs to the south and Trevarian beacon went skywards.

'Digory Joliffe's watcher!' said Venn, gaping. 'I clean forgot him.'

He had kept good watch. Supposing the alarm took up

along the length of the coast—Tintagel to Hartland, Pentire to Trevoise, St. Agnes to Land's End—it would be their doing, Venn's and Venetia's! The thought was awful and splendid.

'Come quick or we shall be too late to see.' Venn grasped her hand and they raced back along the ridge, past the sheep pen, down into St. Ruan valley. The clamour of the bells was louder here; behind them a halo of blood-red light crowned Barbary Beacon. Venetia stumbled but Venn dragged her on downhill, her breath coming in gasping sobs. They came to the bank that overhung the St. Ruan road and sank on to it in the wet grass. For a moment Venetia thought it was just the furious pounding of her heart in her ears, then she realized it was a horse passing them at a gallop.

'That would be the hobbler,' whispered Venn. 'He calls the men to arms. I hope they stop ringing soon or they will be caught—listen!'

There was a tiny cluster of cottages just below them by the stream. The horseman drew up and hammered on one of the doors.

'Turn out!' he shouted. 'The alarm's given. Muster at your post to draw your arms!' Then, in answer to some question, 'Down the coast, they say, off Pentire—a whole armada of them!'

He wrenched his horse round and clattered back past them. They heard the hoofs drumming away towards St. Ruan, and as the silence descended again they realized the bells had stopped ringing.

The men called up from the hamlet began to muster in the road and the children could hear their sleepy startled voices in the sudden hush.

'We'm going to the shore right enough. Pass my pike out the winder, Jill.'



'Ow many did 'ee say—three-score ship wur it?' And a woman's voice, practical, soothing.

'There'll be a cuppa warm ale biden' your return, lads.'

They hurried up the road towards the village. The children could hear their smothered oaths as they fastened their clothes and their equipment as they ran. The man with the pike, whose morion was too big for him, held on to it with one hand and awkwardly poked out with his pike with the other. ('Serves him right,' whispered Venn, 'for not keeping it in the armoury like the rest of them.') The voices and heavy tread had no sooner faded up the road than an organized tramp of marching feet approached them from St. Ruan.

'Here comes the real thing!' Venn wriggled further up the bank in his excitement. Venetia groped for his hand and found it. His warm grasp gave her confidence. They lay quiet in the grass, the blaze of their beacon throwing a red glare on the whole valley.

They came down the road, the gallant men of St. Ruan—an officer in front, then the hobblers on their light 'hobbies', standing by to ride with despatches, the arquebusiers with their muskets, the bowmen with their longbows slung, the pike-men (Venetia recognized Jewell's voice barking an order), the two culverins trundling along on rough wheels with their teams of gunners harnessed in front of them, and, lastly, the pioneers with their bills and staves. They looked imposing tramping down the road in the lurid light, their long shadows dancing along the bank beside them.

But just on a level with Venetia and Venn some unconscious jester passed the order to advance in rapid time. The horses broke into a trot and the serried ranks wavered, shook and shambled into an awkward kind of dog-trot. Then the drama became a farce. None of the equipment

seemed to fit; morions clattered to the ground, precious ammunition rolled into the roadway, the pike-men, grabbing at their insecure accoutrement, poked their pikes into their neighbours' eyes, and one of the culverins took charge on the slope and thundered down through the ranks in front, the harnessed gun team running for their lives ahead of it and yelling to clear a passage.

Venetia had never really heard Trevennor laugh till then. Secure in the din and confusion, he lay back on the bank and shouted and howled. It was so catching that Venetia began to laugh too. They laughed at the madness of the night, the blaze of their beacon, the flare of Trevarian down the coast, at the hobblers and the pike-men and the culverins, and the brave loud clamour of the bells. What a night—ye gods, what a night!

'We must see the fate of that gun,' gasped Venn, with tears running down his face. He jumped down into the road, gazing at the vanishing chaos, and Venetia scrambled after him.

It was then they heard a noise close behind. They turned to see a party of mounted officers, including Christo, Michael Erisey and Sir John Treherne.

'TREVENNOR!' cried Sir John, and the echo of his voice went all up the valley.

## Chapter 15

### PENANCE

VENETIA never knew what Sir John said to his son the next morning. Venn was in there a good quarter of an hour and when he came out again there was a high flush in his cheeks and his pose of carelessness deceived no one.

'Peter and Peregrine,' announced Mr. Erisey, opening the door for them. 'Go down to the music-room, Trevennor.'

The door closed on the two younger boys. Mr. Erisey stood against it like a sentinel. Venetia looked at him under her lashes but he stared fixedly over her head out of the window. They waited. Sir John's voice rose in volume behind the thick door, pausing every now and then for a humble murmur, which must be Perry or Peter. Then the door opened again so suddenly that Mr. Erisey nearly fell into the room backwards and Venetia checked an insane nervous giggle. Perry and Peter came out looking distinctly scared.

'Go to the music-room,' said Mr. Erisey in the same awful tones. '—Venetia.'

Sweeping her skirt around her, with her chin tilted bravely and her heart cold as a stone, Venetia went in.

Sir John was standing by the fireplace in his own private sanctum. Books he never read lined one wall, the other was hung with deers' antlers and trophies of the chase, and the sun shone in brightly, unsuitably Venetia felt. To bridge the awkward pause she dropped him a curtsy.

'So,' bellowed the great voice. 'Mistress Mortimer so

far forgets herself as to prance in her breeches on the cliffs at midnight with my knave of a son, and finds it a joyful thing to wake weary labourers from their rest?’

Venetia raised her eyes and saw Sir John’s boots, his breeches, the goodly expanse of his doublet, his massive shoulders, his square black beard towering over her. It was not a reassuring sight, but she raised her eyes further and looked him in the face.

‘Yes, sir,’ she said, steadying her voice. ‘I take an equal share of the blame.’

‘Ho! That’s as may be. And no manner of confessions will alter young Trevennor’s punishment, if that’s what you have in mind.’ But she detected a change in his voice and knew she had done the right thing.

Sir John Treherne, for all his bluntness, was no fool. He had not come to his position in the county without a fair judgement of men—and women, too, for that matter. He pulled a chair to him and sat down, his hands resting on his knees.

‘Come here, young Mortimer!’ he ordered.

Venetia came and stood in front of him, swallowing a panicky lump in her throat.

‘Now see here, child! The Lord has given you a sharp wit; apply it for once! The beacon fires, the alarm bells, aye and the centons themselves, are here for a purpose—for the purpose of defending the realm. Our St. Ruan soldiers and their like are the only army we have. This is all no matter for laughter but a very present danger. France is mighty, Spain is mightier, and the defences of England are weak. We have the sea around us and the coast, a few ships, a few arms, and a few men of a marvellous great courage. Above all we have a God who defends His own, and under Him a Queen who wields us like a sceptre in her hands. What we can do to safeguard this



unity we must endeavour to the best of our powers. Supposing the next time the alarm comes, when a real enemy fleet is bearing down upon England, these same tired labourers wake and say, "They Pendellion childer up to their tricks" and turn over in their beds and sleep again? Would you feel you had contributed to the service of your prince?"

'No, Sir John,' breathed Venetia.

'Think on it well, then, and next time that my fine Trevennor puts you up to mischief, ask yourself, "Is my sport worth the candle?" and weigh the bigger harm you may let loose unawares. Most women, God bless and curse 'em for it, have influence on men's lives. Yours now lies with my son, Trevennor. He will look to you, young Mortimer, for the seal on his plans. So remember now!'

Sir John heaved himself up and moved to the door.

'Girls who share the fun with boys must share the punishment,' he said. 'I have ordered my secretary to wallop the lot of you. He awaits you in the music-room.'

He opened the door for her and closed it again without even watching to see if she went downstairs. Because of his complete trust in her, Venetia walked straight down to the music-room, very thoughtful.

She met Perry in the hall, moving stiffly and crimson in the face.

'Did he beat you hard, Perry?'

'He did. He is a brute! Trevennor got far worse than us, though.'

'Oh, poor Venn! Where is he?'

'Gone to his room for the day on bread and water. I'm just off to mine. Good-bye.'

Perry wheeled away, let out a sudden 'Ow!' and went awkwardly up the stairs.

Venetia began to feel fear moving within her again. She

eyed the door of the music-room. It had to be faced! After all, Sir John had not been so bad, though he had made her feel more small and stupid than she had believed possible.

Venetia went into the music-room.

Michael Erisey was at the virginals, running his fingers along the keys with a silly little tinkle. He looked round, distinctly surprised to see her.

'Sir John sent me down, Mr. Erisey, to receive my punishment.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Erisey, 'oh, I see!'

He bit his lip for a moment. Then he got up slowly and went over to one of the music shelves. Venetia looked out of the window on to the bowling lawn. It was a lovely day at last, no wind and the bees humming among the flowers. Henry Trevanion, just freed from lessons for his 'intermission', was playing bowls with one of the gentlemen-in-waiting called Robert. Baby Frances with Joanna was watching them and Rowland Mundy walked across the garden with the bailiff to visit the home farm. Every one about their own concerns, caring nothing for anyone else, and life running on and on——

Mr. Erisey came back from rummaging in the shelves carrying a delicate little riding switch.

'I'll let you off lighter than you deserve,' he said, his voice cool and impersonal. 'Your left hand please, Venetia.'

At the first stroke she nearly cried out and her hand closed convulsively. Erisey put his hand under hers and Venetia shut her eyes. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

Mr. Erisey placed a rolled silk kerchief in her palm and closed her hand over it. Venetia felt a little sick, and by the way the sunlight was blurring in front of her eyes she knew she had tears of pain in them.

'Put it in cold water,' advised Michael Erisey, not unkindly. 'Feeling all right?'

Venetia nodded.

'Go up to your room then, and stay there till to-morrow morning.'

It was a mocking fate that to-day, after so much wind and wet, the summer should have arrived in all its glory. She sat at her window looking out at the busy life of the stable-yard, at Sir John's horse being led away through the archway, at Christo and Menhenitt inspecting a hound, at Patience in her pretty green apron tripping across from the laundry with Venetia's clean linen under her arm, and loitering to gossip with Rob Jewell by the pump. There were pigeons circling round the dove-cot and rooks in the oak trees, whose wind-swept tops showed just beyond. The cooing of the doves and the rooks' harsh 'caw-caw' blended into a tune of high summer.

Nurse came up with a miserable little dinner of saffron cake and water. She exclaimed when she saw Venetia's hand and insisted on bathing it at once in warm water, which smarted a lot. The splendid white silk kerchief with its edge of silver lace was a sorry sight, all screwed up and stained.

'Poor Mr. Erisey's kerchief!' exclaimed Venetia surprisingly.

'So that young jackanapes dared laid hands on my chicken, did he! I'd like to lay my hands on him.'

'I don't think he wanted to, Nurse. It was Sir John's orders!'

'Huh! So Sir John is too fine a gentleman to whip you hisself, is he?'

'I am rather glad he didn't. I am sure Mr. Erisey was more kind.'

'Well, here's your dinner, and rotten it is. I'll get Joanna and see what we can do for you all for supper.'

'Oh, please do. How is Venn—and Perry?'

'In their rooms, and Master Trevennor in a towering rage, so that Joanna says. Just like his father.'

During the afternoon Joanna came to her room with a message from Venn. Venetia unscrewed the note and read:

Are you sore? I am both in body and soul. I am thinking out another idea. My love to you, Isold; it was worth it was it not?

TRISTRAM.

'Is he still in a rage. Joanna?'

'Noa, Master Venn's cooler now. "Joanna," he says to me, "be my Mercury (whatever that meant!) and take this to Mistress Venetia," and he puts his arms about me like a baby and says, "when I hug you I feel I hug the round earth." All this chatter about the round earth indeed! In my young day the earth were flat and nobody worried themselves nor wished it otherwise, till Frankie Drake up and said different. There is no manner o' sense to it.'

'Is there any news in the house, Joanna?'

'None I knows, bar guests to-morrow and Sir Richard Grenville coming down from Stowe about they musters.'

'Who is he?'

'Who is Richard Grenville? You been three months in Cornwall and say a fool thing like that? He's a great gentleman in these parts, justice and was Sheriff, and cousin to Sir George who lives Launceston way.'

Joanna waddled off, very scathing.

Venetia read Venn's note again and fervently hoped his new idea was one she could set the seal of her approval upon, because now she felt somewhat responsible to Sir John.

She fell to looking out of the window again. It was strange that one day's imprisonment should be so irksome, while her father had been close on three months a captive within the grim walls of the Marshalsea, in one of the



meanest, most plague-ridden quarters of London. Plague-ridden—and it was now high summer! The little wandering thought turned her cold. She grabbed her *Morte d'Arthur*, determined to shut it out, and read at random:

And wit ye well, said Tristram unto the king, I did the battle for the love of mine uncle, King Mark, and for the love of the country of Cornwall, and for to increase mine honour. . . . O gentle knight, said La Beale Isoud, full woe am I of thy departing, for I never saw man that I owed so good will to. And therewithal she wept heartily. Madame, said Sir Tristram, I promise you faithfully that I shall be all the days of my life your knight.

The morning came at last and they were free. But not free to wander. They had two days lessons to catch up with and Venn in the afternoon was called for another interview with his father. He found Venetia afterwards sitting on a bank in the knot garden, enjoying the sunny quiet of the afternoon. Venn lowered himself down beside her and glowered at the pretty coloured patterns of flowers spread like a patchwork quilt at their feet.

'I am going to be sent away.'

'Venn! Why and when?'

'In the autumn. Father is going to ask Sir Richard Grenville to take me as a page. He says it is time some one else knocks some manners into me. I knew it would come soon. Christo, you see, went to the Champernownes when he was nine and only came home last year. I would rather go to Grenville because he is a great soldier, and a seaman, too, but it is the devil going away now you are here.'

Then Venetia spoke out a dread that had long been on her mind.

'We don't belong here, you know, Perry and I. When father is released from prison we shall go back to London to Mortimer House.'

‘Then it looks like the end,’ said Venn gloomily, digging his heels into the green turf. ‘I could have come back quite often because Stowe is not so very far up the coast, but if you go to London, then there’s an end—to Joyous Gard and the Fellowship and our adventures.’

It was like a horrible echo of the paragraph she had read in *Morte d’Arthur* the evening before. Like Isold, she felt like weeping heartily.

‘Do cheer up!’ she said to Venn, ‘Sir Richard Grenville may not want you.’

At which he took umbrage. They were both so upset they forgot all about Venn’s new plan.

It was not in the nature of Trevennor Treherne to remain miserable for long, and by supper-time he was looking quite bright again. Venetia immediately caught his mood. After all, it was only mid-July; the autumn was a long way off.

Sir Richard Grenville sat next to Lady Treherne. He was arresting to look at and the fresh gust of his personality swept everything before him. Within five minutes the boys were all gaping at him and following every gesture with round eyes. He had fair hair, growing back very high on his forehead, a silky moustache and beard and penetrating grey eyes under level brows. His complexion was tanned to a ruddy brown and, when he walked, they noticed he was tall, with splendid athlete’s shoulders. He was perhaps forty. Such was Sir Richard Grenville, trusted servant of the State and sworn enemy of all Roman Catholics, who owned half North Cornwall and ruled the rest of it with an iron hand.

Venetia liked him because he talked of Gilbert’s voyage and seemed bent on its success. She gathered that he, too, was cousin to Sir Humphrey and Mr. Raleigh, and when some one was so ill-advised as to mention the return of the

*Barque Raleigh* to Plymouth, he broke in with a most emphatic denial that the owner had any part in it.

'A great deal hangs on this voyage,' he said across the table to Mr. Roscarrock, who seemed an old friend. 'If it fails (which God forbend) I made a pledge to Walter Raleigh I would go and plant a colony in the west myself.'

'Might we then go to sea, sir?' asked Venn, in his bold fashion.

Sir Richard bent a fierce eye upon him.

'Anything might happen, young man, once you get to Stowe.' He raised his voice, 'By the way, Sir John, what is this story of your beacons being lit and spreading a false alarm down the coast?'

An uncomfortable silence fell on the table. Lady Treherne profited by it to rise and beckon to the ladies to withdraw. She had been out of her depth with Sir Richard's conversation for some time—though he was the sort of man who expected no more from women than a listening role. As long as they kept to orchards and fruit all was well for Lady Treherne, but ships had always been away beyond her range.

So Venetia did not hear how Sir John answered him, or whether the scraping of chairs and opening of doors provided a sufficient excuse to change the conversation. But when Venn came out on the terrace afterwards he approached her with a little swagger and remarked:

'I think we will do very well together—Grenville and me.'

## Chapter 16

### THE WITCHES' SABBATH

'IT was Joanna who first gave me the idea,' said Trevennor. 'She told me a deal about witchcraft when I was shut up.'

'We must do it! Soon, please!' begged Peter.

Venetia was more doubtful.

'We mustn't wake anyone from their beds this time,' she said uneasily.

'No need for that,' said Venn. 'We will keep to the woods and only go out into the open to the holy well. No one will be about there after sunset. Christo is coming too.'

If Christo were coming that took a burden off Venetia's shoulders. After all, he was fourteen and going to Cambridge in the spring, and if he could enter into the mummary it was not for 'young Mortimer' to hang back.

This was Venn's new idea. Joanna had been telling him of the mediaeval feasts when the witches held their 'Sabbaths', Candlemas in February, Roodmas in April, Lammas the first day of August and Hallow-e'en at the end of October. Joanna, like so many of the old Cornish people, was still Catholic at heart, and along with her veneration for the feasts went a rooted belief in witchcraft. She told Venn, who now passed on the knowledge to the others, how, for those who were gifted to see them, the witches gathered for their Sabbaths from the four corners of the earth, riding on their broomsticks against the stars with their cracked laughter floating back down the wind. Granny Rowe had heard them one night and, running to



her window, had seen the sky all black with them, and from that hour she was crazed as a March hare, poor ole fool, and was possessed until the Lord took her.

'Do you think we had best not meddle perhaps?' asked Peter, a little uncomfortably, when he had heard about Granny Rowe.

'If we dress up to scare them and drink of the holy well they can't hurt us,' said Venn. 'Besides, Peter—do you not want to see them, just for a brief glimpse?'

'Yes,' breathed Peter, wriggling. Venetia could not tell if his brother were mocking or in earnest.

'I wonder why the St. Ruan army were so furiously angry over the beacon affair?' she ruminated, her mind still running on awaking the country people.

'That's easy explained,' said Venn. 'All Cornishmen love fooling one another but nothing vexes them more than being tricked themselves. Let them be, red-head! We will wake no one this time! Hallow-e'en of course is the best night for witches, but it is too long to wait these days.' (His eyes met Venetia's with meaning.) 'So Lammas-eve will have to content us. That is the last night of July. I hope we have moonlight and a wind—that brings 'em best, they say.'

He spoke of good witch weather as if he were discussing good scenting conditions for the hounds!

July ran the last of its course with no wind and a spell of still golden weather. There was a bloom on all the land. The corn, which had sprung up green and tall during the rain, ripened almost overnight and they started harvesting on the hills, before the autumn gales should lay it. The last day of the month they were mowing the barley in the field above Barbary Cliff and the children went out in the afternoon to help chase the hares.

It was very exciting. As the mowers advanced on the

last square of corn left standing, the harvesters and villagers and vagabonds closed in, hammering gongs and hallooing like mad things. It was the one time in the whole year that every Tom, Dick and Harry could poach Sir John's game with impunity. Then the lusty long-legged hares broke in all directions and there was a stampede and a bloodthirsty chorus of yells and screams, and a tremendous flourishing of sticks. The proud killers held up their prizes by the leg for all to see, and the rest of the hares fled away down the hill to the sanctuary of the warren or the woods. Venetia was secretly glad to see so many escape—there was something almost frightening in that snarling chorus of yells and screams. But a clubbed hare meant a royal dinner for some one and there were rousing quarrels over doubtful ownership, and some people came by blue-black eyes and swollen heads for getting in the way of the sticks at that vital, delirious moment.

After that the children helped bind the last of the barley, with the sea shining like metal before them, so bright that it dazzled the eyes. Venetia shaded her eyes to look and wondered how Sir Humphrey Gilbert did, out there in the vast unknown west.

'There are some verses I had to learn once,' said Venn beside her.

'Who seeks the way to win renown,  
Or flies with wings of high desire;  
Who seeks to wear the laurel crown,  
Or hath the mind that would aspire;  
Tell him his native soil eschew,  
Tell him go range and seek a new.'

'How strange!' cried Venetia, and turned in wonder. 'How did you know I was thinking that way, Venn?'

'Why,' said Venn, 'I was thinking that way myself.'

The night came on, Lammas-eve, still and beautiful with a rising moon. They had been on the terrace till sunset and Peter had been working himself into a frenzy of the supernatural by reading a book entitled *Of Ghostes and Spirites, Walking by Night*, translated from the writings of a gentleman who rejoiced in the name of Lewes Laveterus.

They retired to their rooms without the customary grumbling, so much so that Michael Erisey watched them disappear from under his brows and then said to Merryn,

'This gentle behaviour has a flavour of ill omen to me!'

Merryn, also on her way indoors, smiled at him.

'I think a midnight feast is intended—there was much whispering and smuggling aside of cakes during supper. Let it pass, Michael! You were a boy not so long ago. Please!'

Michael bowed over her hand.

'As you command, lady. But if it is beacons again, God help 'em—I won't!'

'I promise you Venn would never play the same joke twice. Good night, Michael.'

Confident that no one had touched the fringe of their impenetrable secrecy, Venetia prepared for bed, waiting until Nurse and Patience should take their leave and go to theirs. Patience, in particular, seemed loath to go. She hovered around when Nurse had departed, cleaning the combs, doing other little jobs that could easily wait till the morning. At last Venetia looked up crossly from the great bed and met her maid's shining eyes.

'Oh, Mistress Venetia, I must tell you! I am so happy I don't know what to do. Rob Jewell and me is betrothed.'

'Oh Lord!' Venetia quickly recovered herself. 'That is grand news, Patience. When did he ask you?'

'This afternoon, mistress, in the herb garden when I was gathering the rue you asked for. He says we mus'

bide a while and that suits me because I wouldn't leave you till things is more settled. Rob has ambitions. He says he will be ready to step into chief huntsman's place when Master Menhenitt retires, and he is over fifty now.'

'Patience, you are sure of Jewell? I mean you know he is a man of his word?'

'Indeed I do. He even told me he has been courting with another girl but he has been trying hard to break with her for some while.'

'I wish you joy then, dear Patience.' Venetia jumped up and hugged her, as she used to do when Patience first came to the nursery as a round-faced country lass not much older than Venetia was now.

When she had gone, and the Yeoman of the Bed-chamber had extinguished the candles in the little drawing-room next door, Venetia got up again, lit her light and began to dress. She chose an old gown of jade green and pinned it at the bodice with her dolphin brooch carved from a moonstone, her birthday gift from Sir Philip Sidney. She unbraided her hair and combed it loose around her shoulders, copper-red and glossy as silk in the candlelight. Then she took her long black travelling cloak and hung it from her shoulders, twirling twice in front of the glass to watch it swing out like the wings of a bat. Her eyes looked green, like her dress, with a subtle gleam in them, the brows tilting upwards at the corners.

Lastly, Venetia took a handful of holly and rue, blew out her candle and felt her way out. She stole across the little drawing-room (the curtains were not drawn and the moonlight fell across the floor) and through two more empty rooms to the head of the stairs. There was a dim light there that burned all night long, and two more lower down. Venetia descended softly, keeping close to the wall to avoid creaking, to the music-room.



They were all foregathered by candlelight, waiting for her—even to *Just*, Venn's hound. For a moment she hardly knew them. There was an Ethiopian, with blackened face and gold ear-rings, whose eyes and whose voice were Venn's; there was an old crooked man with a straggly beard and a quavery whine, beneath which disguise it was odd to recognize Christo; there was a tattered lunatic-looking Wild Man, with hair on end, who was her brother Perry. In the shadows she saw the likeness of an imp, in a black close-fitting suit with silver-streaked face—Peter as one of Mr. Laveterus' Spirites Walking by Night. A prancing bear emerging from under the table must be Henry, and Thomasine was thinly masqued as a rather nondescript nymph.

'You make a mighty convincing witch,' said Venn the Ethiopian. 'The most dangerous are always red-heads. Why are you so late?'

'Patience kept me,' said Venetia. 'Here is some holly and rue.' She gave out the little sprigs to each of the company—holly and rue, the proven charms against withcraft. Her own she pinned with her moonstone brooch. 'Now, how do we go?'

'Through the garden, young sirs,' quavered the Ancient, and Christo mimed so cleverly that they all giggled. 'Have you the eatables, nigger? I hold the drink.'

'Yes. And keep to the yew hedge,' said Venn. 'Follow myself and the Ancient. To heel, Hell-hound!'

'If it is walking,' said Henry Trevanion, emerging from his bear skin, 'I am thundering hot, so will carry my vizard. Follow on, Wild Man, after your sister.'

They all tip-toed out of the side door into the garden. It was moonlight—such moonlight as Venetia had never seen, not even the first night at Mount Edgcumbe. The whole garden was flooded with it, layers of flat,

greeny-silver, shining, as if the light did not fall from above but rose from somewhere down-under. The shadow of the yew hedge, with its towers and battlements, cut across it sharply as if with a sword.

The strange procession followed after each other in the deep shadow. Even here, on the windy slope of Pendellion, the air was perfectly still. They could smell the musk roses, and the jasmine in the pleached arbour opening to the dew. The little stone satyr at the top of the steps raised his arms to the stars, and he, too, had over him the *glamourie*, the rare magic of the moonlight.

They left the garden and turned down into the woods. An owl screamed in the branches above them, his wail oddly human, like a new-born child.

'They are the forerunners of the witches' revels,' said Peter the Spirit in a sepulchral whisper. The sound sent an unpleasant little shiver down Venetia's spine.

They moved on across the moonlight patchwork of the shadows and the water voices were welcome to them, coming across the depth of the silence. None of them spoke and they walked quickly. They passed through a clearing and Venetia saw their grotesque shadows on the path—the Hell-hound trotting in front, then the Ancient leaning on his staff, the Ethiopian with turban and great ear-rings, and herself with her flowing hair and cloak. Behind her were the Wild Man, the Spirit, a long gawky nymph and, lastly, a boy walking with a bear's head and paws lolling over his shoulder. The Spirit must have looked at the ground too, because he held up his hands and studied the shadow, two claws with crooked fingers pointing.

They crossed the wall of the estate by some footholds known to Christo and Venn, avoiding the gate. St. Ruan's holy well lay at the crossroad close beyond. The Ancient

went first, stealing warily across the open, pulling back the well door with a creak, and lying flat to drink, only visible from his waist downwards.

He made them go to the well in turn. Venetia came third. She stepped out of the shadows into the empty crossways. The four roads slept in the moonlight, deserted. As Christo and Venn had done, she lay down on her middle and wriggled under the arch, her hands against the cold stone, the mossy drip of the well around her. She lowered herself, down and down, until her lips touched the surface of the water and she could drink. Her nose got wet and the water was cold, colder even than the stone.

To St. Ruan's holy well she murmured a charm:

'From spirits that dwell in forests and fens,  
From unlaid ghosts and gaping tombs,  
From witchcraft, malice and dread designs,  
And the Evil that walks by night,  
Defend us, Lord!

She went back into the shadow by the wall and waited while the others took their turn.

'Is the well very deep?' she whispered to the Ethiopian.  
'It is said to be fathomless.'

When they had all drunk, the Ancient led the way along the bank to a place where they could overlook the churchyard. The great church tower soared above them, its four pinnacles pointing to the stars, and the tombstones shone whitely. Here, strengthened by the holy water, under the shadow of the Lord's house, they waited for the Witches' Sabbath.

They waited long. After a time they heard an uneasy stirring in the tower, the chimes clanged out, followed by the twelve slow strokes of midnight. The noise was sudden and startling and set their ears humming. The last echo

died away, a new day was born, and still the children crouched by the churchyard listening.

They listened until the silence around them ceased to be a silence and came alive, with all the rustlings and murmurings of a summer night. Once a breeze rustled the trees, then faded, even as the last stroke of the clock had faded. Serene and splendid, the huge sky wheeled overhead.

‘Have you heard or seen anything strange?’ whispered Christo the Ancient, at long last.

‘Nothing,’ said the Ethiopian. ‘Has anybody?’

They all shook their heads. Venetia did not know whether she was disappointed or glad. As a preventative measure she put her hand to the holly and rue pinned to her bodice. The holly, the rue, the moonstone brooch, were gone!

It was an awful, sickening moment. She opened her mouth and nearly blurted it out to every one. The next second she closed it again and knew she would never repeat what had happened, for very shame. There it would lie for all time, one of the things she valued the most, in St. Ruan’s well that was fathomless. She knew now the reason for that sudden, strange rustle of wind in the trees. The witches had passed by to their Sabbath, borne on invisible wings, and had laughed because her moonstone, the dolphin that Sir Philip had given her, was lost for ever.

The holly and the rue had gone with it. Anything might happen now.

‘What is it?’ whispered the Ethiopian, his black face close to her ear. ‘Have you seen a ghost after all?’

‘No. Let’s go from here.’

‘We have our feast to eat. We are all of the Fellowship here, shall we eat it in Joyous Gard?’



'Agreed,' said the Ancient. 'It grows chilly in the dew.'

'You should be the bear!' said Henry. 'I'll never be chilly again.'

Once again Joyous Gard brought comfort to Venetia, under the nagging weight of her misfortune. Dear grey house in the valley, all moon-bewitched, with the meadow grass newly mown and a white dew-haze upon it—walking through it was like treading on water that was solid. And the tall windows shone as if there were a light behind them, but when they came nearer they saw it was only the reflection of the moon in the glass.

The side window had blown open, but all was quiet as the grave. They climbed in, one by one, and the musty wood smell, loved and familiar, came to meet them, and the friendly silence.

'I wish I had brought a candle,' muttered the Ethiopian as he dropped in last, heaving the Hell-hound over the sill.

'There is no need,' said Venetia. 'The room is ablaze with moonlight.'

It made a great black and white pattern across the floor, and slanted up the fireplace to the winged stag and the deeply graved legend—LOYALTY. They sat down in the centre of the pattern, the Fellowship of the Table Round in mummers' disguise, feasting on the witches' sabbath.

'Here *Just!*' said the Ethiopian. 'Leave the rats and come to the pasties. You dole out, Red Witch. Double allowance for me, please!'

'Here is the drink, masters,' quavered the Ancient. 'A most virulent brew of marigold wine.'

'It was a strange little breeze, was it not?' suggested Peter the Spirit, and a clammy hand seemed to close on Venetia's heart. She rationed out the pasties and fruit pies and they munched in silence.

There was a sudden noise at the window. The Hell-

hound jumped up with a growl, Peter raised his streaky face and they all turned. A woman was half-way across the sill. Her hair was loose and dishevelled and tears were all over her face. She gave one look at them, sitting there in the moonlight, and her mouth distorted into a terrible grimace. She screamed, an unearthly, animal noise that turned the blood cold. In a minute she was back across the sill and tearing blindly past the windows towards the back of the house, screaming, screaming—*Just* plunged after her, barking.

‘That is the end!’ said Christo. ‘We must beat about rapidly! Make every horrible yell you can think of, *be* a ghost all you know how!’

He leapt out of the window, Venn after him, halloaing and whistling to *Just*.

They all followed, hot foot, Venetia sweeping the remains of the feast into the pocket of her cloak as she went. Across the dewy meadow they pranced and ran, the Ancient flourishing his stick with high insane cracks of laughter. ‘Ai, ai, ai!’ wailed an Ethiopian, flashing white teeth in a black face, his Hell-hound bounding at his heels. A red witch shrieked with her hair streaming behind her and her cloak swinging like a bat’s wings. And beside her leapt a Wild Man singing a crazy song, and a Spirit with silver gashes across his face, and after her a Nymph emitting piercing squeaks, and last of all a bear, galumphing over the grass with a fearsome ‘Oof, oof, oof!’

So the Fellowship were routed from Joyous Gard, across the hazy moonlight meadow to the shadow of the trees. The Ancient reached shelter first and sat there wheezing, with his beard all awry.

‘Never,’ he gasped, ‘never shall I see the like again!’

‘Anyone like a turn at the bear?’ said Henry Trevanion. ‘Oof, it’s hot!’

## Chapter 17

### THE MOONSTONE

'VENETIA,' said Merryn, 'have you heard I am re-opening my house of Lynn?'

Venetia stood still, the taffeta of a flowered gown gripped between her fingers.

'Indeed, Merryn? What has brought you to that decision?'

Merryn clasped a delicate string of pearls about her throat.

'Various things have led up to it. For one, now that this Star-Chamber case is settled, I shall have more ready money to spend, and how better can I spend it than on my own home?'

For another thing, Bodrugan is dead, thought Venetia, standing on a stool to hang the dress in the cupboard.

'For another,' said Merryn, 'I shall have to make new arrangements. The caretaker does not wish to stay any longer.'

'Why is that?' asked Venetia carelessly. 'I should have thought it a very pleasant, idle life for him.'

'I believe it was. Do not repeat this to the servants, Venetia, but he has come to me quite convinced that the house is possessed by evil spirits. I laughed at him because Lynn has never been haunted by anything; it is one of the happiest, most peaceful houses I know. But, as you are aware, the countryman, once he gets that conviction into his head, is beyond all reason, and truly I never have seen a man so moved with fear—he went white as wax and shook at the knees.'

‘What—what form did his hauntings take?’

‘Oh, the most fantastical forms. Devils with grisly death-masks, and bears and wild men and witches with streeling hair, feasting in the moonlight and floating over the valley without touching the ground—Lord knows what else! It was hard to keep a straight face, yet I had it in my heart to be sorry for the man. Lammas-eve he says it was (it would be, of course!). He says his daughter saw them all to start with and then he and his wife looked out of the window. I should put it down to coltsfoot wine, or else some prank by the other villagers—just the sort of thing they love to do. Anyway, nonsense apart, his daughter Julian is marrying young Pengelly at St. Elid and the old people wish to go and live with her on the farm. Not a great joy to Julian, I feel, but then I don’t fancy her much myself.’

‘She worked in our dairy, did she not?’

‘Yes, a handsome, untidy-looking slut. I thought at one time the under-huntsman Jewell had an eye to her, but I am glad that was only gossip. Pengelly will do well for Mistress Julian. Is it true that your little Patience is to marry Jewell?’

‘Yes,’ said Venetia. ‘Do you think it a good plan?’

‘Excellent. Rob Jewell is a very fine lad and Sir John says he should do well to follow Menhenitt when the pace gets too hot for the old man. They should be very happy together, as well as being what my dear sister-in-law would call “well-suited”!’

It had worked out better than Venetia had expected, that little tangle, though she could not help remembering with sudden pity the desolation in Julian’s face, the tears, the dishevelled hair, when she had appeared at the window that night. She must have just met Jewell and he must have told her about Patience. Still, Julian would



have made him a bad wife, not like Patience, who would carry the honour of wife to the chief huntsman naturally and gaily.

Venetia's wandering thoughts went back to Merryn, now standing at the window in the sunlight looking out to the coast. It was close on supper-time but they were ready early this evening. Venetia thought how young she looked, and how proudly she held her head under the dark cloud of hair. It would be pleasant to grow up like Merryn, as gay and friendly, and to move with so queenly a grace.

'What of your plans?' asked Merryn. 'Has anything altered?'

'Not yet. I sometimes wonder—' Venetia stopped but went on bravely, 'I sometimes wonder if my father will be given his freedom at all, or if we will go on hoping and they talking, and his friends saying they are working on his behalf, and he remain a prisoner always.'

This was a new bitter spirit moving in her, the same fatalism that had come upon her since she had lost the moonstone in St. Ruan's well. Sometimes it seemed so close to despair that it frightened her.

'What was Bodrugan like, Merryn?'

Merryn looked at her, her blue eyes alive with some memory, angry, Venetia thought. She hesitated, seeking the right words.

'William Bodrugan? Not particularly villainous. A reddish face, square, stubborn, a trifle grasping and rather dull—yes, just a dull little man.'

Venetia was disconcerted. She could not look upon the villain of the piece, the would-be murderer of her father, as a dull little man. She had always imagined him tall and loud, with a blasphemous tongue and a livid scar down his face—not simply *dull*.

During supper she thought over the news that Merryn was going back to Lynn. For her sake, she was glad. But it was the end of Joyous Gard as Venetia knew it, the Joyous Gard of the Fellowship, her dear, dusty, silent room which had always been a sanctuary.

It was strange that it was their Lammas-eve mummary that had brought it about so soon, for Meliagraunce's complaint must have hurried on Merryn's decision. If Julian had not chosen to fall out with Rob Jewell that evening and had not come in upon them and taken fright, then things would no doubt have worked out in a more leisurely fashion, perhaps lasted out the summer. Venetia thought again, superstitiously, of her moonstone, tangled in the holly and rue, lying somewhere in the depths of St. Ruan's holy well.

They went on to the terrace that evening, as was the custom, and brought out their music. The sunset cast a tender glow on them all and the long shadows of the yews trooped across the lawn.

'What's wrong with the *Padstow May Song*?' asked Sir John. 'We have not had that for a long while. There was a time we heard nothing else.'

'But, father, it is July, not May!' objected Venn, 'and evening, too.'

'What of it? I sing Christmas carols in my wash-tub every day! Come now, who starts?'

So, for the first time, Venetia heard the May Song all through. It was a long song with a catchy little tune, and they each took parts and fitted names in to the verses:

'Arise up, Mr. Erisey, your sword by your side,  
For summer is a come unto day.  
Your steed is in the stable, awaiting for to ride,  
In the merry morning of May.'

'Arise up, Mistress Mortimer, all in your gown of green,  
For summer is acome unto day,  
You are as fine a lady as waits upon the Queen  
In the merry morning of May.

'Arise up, Mistress Merryn, arise out of your bed,  
For summer is acome unto day,  
Your chamber shall be strewed with the white rose and the red  
In the merry morning of May.'

Michael Erisey sang, very slow and sad:

'Where are the young men that here now should dance?  
For summer is acome unto day,  
Some they are in England and some they are in France,  
In the merry morning of May.'

Then Merryn and Venetia sang together:

'Where are the maidens that here now should sing?  
For summer is acome unto day,  
They are in the meadows the flowers gathering  
In the merry morning of May.'

Again all together,

'The young men of Padstow might if they would  
For summer is acome unto day,  
They might have built a tall ship and gilded her with gold,  
In the merry morning of May.'

That carried Venetia back to the deck of the *Delight*, with Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Captain Winter and Sweetapple, the seaman, laughing at Michael Erisey in the hobby-horse. How strange it was the way ships sailed away into the west out of the lives of men and women in England. Drake was away for three long years and came back at the end of it, covered with fame and riches and honour, out of the east. Venetia looked at Venn. He was staring into the sunset and she knew, without being told,

that he was dreaming of the day when he, too, would go westward.

‘That May Song,’ said Sir John, looking at Venetia, ‘was written after the hobby-horse had scared away another invasion attempt off this coast, many years ago when men were more credible. The good citizens took it on to the cliff—Trevose I expect—and the Frenchmen saw it, mistook it for the devil, and sheered off.’

Venn and Christo and Venetia all smiled at the same minute, thinking of Julian and Meliagraunce on Lammas-eve.

They were harvesting late, this fine evening. It was so still they could hear the voices of the labourers on the opposite hill, calling to each other. The sun set and the colour died out of the garden, leaving only the pale faces of the roses turned towards them. Suddenly Venetia longed for this minute to last, for them all to go on sitting in the summer twilight on the terrace, listening to the harvesters—Michael fingering his lute, Merryn leaning her chin on her hand, Sir John with his hand on his wife’s wrist in a gesture of unusual gentleness, Venn looking westwards towards the sea. This was Pendellion as she wished to remember it always.

‘Come in, dear lady,’ said Sir John to Lady Treherne, ‘the damp will be getting at our old bones.’

The moment had passed, though the others still sat on. After a while, Michael Erisey started to sing again:

‘Alas! my love, ye do me wrong  
To cast me off discourteously,  
When I have loved you so long  
Delighting in your company.’

He was singing to Merryn and her voice led the chorus cool and sweet:



'Greensleeves was all my joy,  
Greensleeves was my delight,  
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,  
And who but Lady Greensleeves?'

The measured lovely melody swung out across the garden in the dusk. Michael sang on:

'Thou couldst desire no earthly thing  
But still thou hadst it readily;  
Thy music still to play and sing,  
And yet thou wouldst not love me.'



MERRYN SAT VERY STILL, HER CHIN IN HER HAND

The song ended. Merryn sat very still, her chin in her hand, Michael watched her.

'I wonder if what you said this evening was true,' said Merryn to Venetia, 'that sometimes we may live in hope and expectation for a long while and the dream will never be real, because it is but a dream—an illusion at the end.'

She spoke half to herself. They sat there, silent, while the stars came out overhead. Michael Erisey was the first to move. He stood up, stretched carelessly, looked at Merryn.

'I am going for a brief turn in the garden before bedtime,' he said. 'Will you come, or are you tired?'

'Thank you, Michael, I think I will come.' She accepted his arm and they walked down the steps into the garden.

'So the wind blows from a new quarter!' said Venn.

But Venetia could only think, with an absurd mounting panic, of her moonstone, the moonstone that Sidney had given her the night her father went to prison, lost in the ice-cold deeps of St. Ruan's well.

## Chapter 18

### THE HART ROYAL

As autumn and the rutting season came on, Venetia became aware of a new note outside her window, to add to the morning clarion of the hunting horn and the sleepy noon chorus of pigeons and rooks, and the whistle of the night wind. This new noise came mostly at evening, about sunset—the deep strident bellow of a hart. It came from down the valley towards Joyous Gard, in the woods below the deer park. Sometimes another voice answered it and sometimes only the echo.

‘There’s a great old hart down in the valley,’ said Sir John several times. ‘He’s been at the crops again. We must hunt him down.’

But they never did. Always, at evening, when the hounds and horses and riders came home, hot and tired, Venetia heard that sunset challenge at the edge of the woods and knew the old hart had tricked them again.

One afternoon towards the end of August, the tenants arrived with long faces and a new list of his crimes. An ‘old hart with a fair high head, big-beamed’ had been ‘at’ the wheat, just when it was about to be carried, and had trampled and mauled it out of pure wantonness. They had hardly gone when Menhenitt came in to report that Rob Jewell had harboured the beast, a hart of sixteen in pride of grace.

‘To-morrow we’ll get him, by all the Powers!’ shouted Sir John. ‘See here, John Menhenitt, if we lay this ghost you will be the richer for a fair new horse and Jewell for three crowns towards his marriage feast, and if we lose

him, or hunt change, by thunder, I'll not come near the hounds this side of Christmas!

'Can we go?' pleaded Trevennor, whose ears were long. 'Please, sir! We have been so diligent of late and you promised Venetia she might follow throughout the day.'

'So it's the young Mortimer again! Very well, go hunting, the whole crowd of you, and I'll swear you'll get your belly-full of sport before sundown.'

'Venetia!' shouted Venn, 'he says you can, we all can! Whoop, whoop, whoop!'

They took hands and whirled round the great hall in a state of excitement.

'Will you two children never grow up?' asked Rowland Mundy, avoiding their capers by a hairbreadth.

'Are you hunting, Mr. Mundy?'

'No, Trevennor, not to-morrow. The steward of the Lanlivery estates is coming over.'

'How ill-timed of him! Are you hunting, Michael?'

'Why of course,' said Michael. 'Have you seen Merryn—Mrs. Treherne?'

'She is in her room,' said Venetia. 'Shall I tell her?'

'No, there is no need.' Michael walked away, whistling. He had been in high good humour lately, and the hint of a swagger in the swing of his cloak and the click of his spurs had become more pronounced. Of Merryn, Venetia was not so sure. She had lost her serenity. When alone, she was either moody or full of a wild gaiety which was not altogether convincing. She told Venetia she was hurrying on the preparations at Lynn, and almost gave the impression that she would be glad to leave Pendellion.

'It is a bad thing to be cooped up with relations-in-law for over long,' she remarked once. 'Life loses its fair



proportions. Not that I could be ungrateful for one minute to Sir John for all he has done for me.'

It was then that Venetia thought again of her lost moonstone. For some reason she felt Merryn's luck had changed that Lammas-eve, though she could not in any way explain it. She only knew that Merryn, for all her infectious moods of gaiety, was not really happy.

When she went to her room that evening before hunting, and Patience was telling her that Rob Jewell had gone out to make sure of his deer, and Nurse was grumbling: 'All this rough riding is wrong for young ladies, I say. Sir Nicholas would look poorly upon it——' Venetia heard the hoarse roar down the valley.

'There he goes again!' she cried, and dashed to the window. Arrogant and fearless, the hart flung out his challenge.

'Rest well, old warrior, before the morrow,' whispered Venetia under her breath.

The coming and going in the yard woke her early but she did not hurry, as when she and Thomasine had gone with the relays. Thomasine was not hunting to-day. She had chosen in preference a birthday party with the Tremaynes at St. Nunn ('Just like her,' said Venn. 'It is only because Michael has no time for her these days!')

The Assembly was held under a great oak at the bottom of the deer park. The cloths were laid in the shade and when the Pendellion party appeared, they found a number of the neighbours already foregathered, including the two most amusing Tremayne boys (who had decided to miss their sister's birthday party) and Digory Joliffe in saffron yellow, wearing a peascod doublet that gave him a most grotesque paunch. His long nose quivered like a ferret's when he saw Merryn riding up, squired by the faithful Michael. It was marvellous the speed with which

news of Sir John's hunting got around. His fallow hounds were famous in the neighbourhood, and the hart of sixteen was not without his own rather disreputable notoriety.

Venetia enjoyed the Assembly. Venn kept her supplied with pigeon pies and slices of cold goose, and venison pasties, and little sausages. They drank claret (the children's carefully watered by the butler behind the scenes) and afterwards white wine ice cold from cooling in the stream, and, at the end, a rich, syrupy drink called Chartreuse, distilled by monks on the continent. There was a breeze, even down here, that moved the chequerwork of the shadows. To every one's delight it also caught the splendid plume of Mr. Joliffe's yellow hat and blew it off into a dish of jelly and cream.

'Most unfortunate,' said poor Digory Joliffe, looking quite upset. 'It was a new hat and in quite the newest shade!' He recovered himself gallantly. 'Such strange names the Court colours have now, Mistress Merryn—*lusty gallant* and *pease porridge tawny*.'

'I should have thought you would wear *goose-green* for the chase, Mr. Joliffe?' said Michael, with a wink at the others.

'You, I see, prefer *popinjay blue*,' retorted poor Mr. Joliffe with a tartness that made Merryn laugh and sent Michael Erisey's hand to his sword hip, but the laugh was against him and he let it pass.

'Henry!' bellowed Sir John, 'HENRY! Pass the dishes to my guests.'

They made a gay pattern in that setting of green, Venetia thought—Mr. Erisey in his maligned blue, Merryn in crimson with a white plume, Perry in red and black, Digory Joliffe in his yellow, herself in brown and gold, with the servants moving among them in the Treherne livery of pale blue and scarlet. Merryn, her back

against the trunk of a great oak, seemed the moving spirit of that Assembly, laughing and teasing as if she had not a care in the world.

'Mrs. Treherne is no longer the grave widow,' said one of the young Tremaynes to another neighbour.

'I think she is more like to become the gay Mrs. Erisey,' was the answer; 'I always felt Michael was prepared to fly high.'

That piece of eavesdropping spoilt the remainder of the Assembly for Venetia, and she was filled with an instant unreasonable hatred for the speaker, a most harmless young man whom she had never seen before and was not like to see again.

She was relieved when Menhenitt and the other huntsmen approached to present their reports and break up the gathering. There was no doubt as to whose deer Sir John would chose to-day. He sent Jewell back at once with the bloodhound to harbour his hart of sixteen.

'To your horses and to business, ladies and gentlemen!' he shouted, with a meaning look towards Merryn and her circle of admirers. 'We have work on hand, and the rest can wait. I want you all to cast abroad about the covert to watch where he breaks, leaving open only the way inland. And for God's sake, gentlemen, keep silent and let my huntsmen work out their own salvation. And don't, gentlemen, I repeat *don't*, over-ride my hounds!'

'That for Digory Joliffe,' murmured Venn. 'Come on, Venetia, you keep along with me.'

'If I can,' said Venetia, as the groom helped her on to *Grey Mortimer*.

They disposed themselves at the edge of the covert as Sir John had ordered. They could hear the bloodhound working in the undergrowth and Jewell encouraging him: 'That's the boy. Soft, soft!' The hunting hounds

waited with Menhenitt a short distance away, still coupled up, with the kennel-boys standing ready.

Jewell, on foot, came blundering into the open once, warding off the branches with his hunting cudgel, and shouted to Menhenitt:

‘He is there but lying close—the ole devil!’

The sounds in the undergrowth rose and fell as the quest moved up and down the covert. ‘We are well placed here for a start,’ whispered Trevennor. ‘Listen to that fool Joliffe laughing at the top of his voice.’

The whimper of the bloodhound broke into a deep bay.

‘Look ware, ware!’ cried Rob Jewell’s voice and Venetia recognized the catch of emotion in it. ‘There, boy, to him! Look ware!’

The bloodhound gave tongue again, more confidently. ‘Come near with the hounds!’ came Jewell’s call. Menhenitt gave the signal and the hounds, cast off their couples, poured into the wood after him. Jewell’s horn sounded in two short blasts, Menhenitt’s answered it. ‘That’s he, that’s he! To him!’ they holloaed, and the whole wood rang with horns.

‘They have roused him, they call on,’ said Venn, hoarse with excitement, ‘Listen!’

A pause. A long-drawn holloa that turned the heart clean over.

‘There he goeth! That’s he!’

Horns, and the sudden crescendo of hound music. Venn cried: ‘Hike holloa, he’s away!’

He dug in his spurs and Venetia chased *Roister’s* tail round the edge of the covert, avoiding the branches, her blood drumming half-way between fear and elation.

They went away from the deer park up the valley like a storm, and those who were too far up-wind to hear that opening chorus never heard it again that day. The wind



was behind them as they clattered along the road to St. Ruan, past Joyous Gard (how strange it was to see the hounds pour across the meadow before the house in full cry), and through the village under the shadow of the church tower, and over the river with a merry splash.

The old outlaw was full of running. After the first burst he took things easily, scorning the high woods and setting his proud head for the moors, where he meant to shake off his noisy pursuers. The first relay joined in as they left the valley and the men had a tale of him pausing to snatch a leafy branch as he went by.

It was windy on the high ground, but blowing off the sea, still at their backs. Venetia was glad to follow Venn because the moor was treacherous going, with hidden bogs among the sedgy tufts of grass. He knew his country. He followed the contours of the slopes, keeping abreast of, but not too close to, the hunting hounds. They came to a dyke full of slimy water. Without checking Venn hustled *Roister* and scrambled over, *Roister* dropping his hind legs but retrieving them cleverly at the very moment when most horses would have given up and fallen backwards into the slime.

Venetia had never jumped such a thing on *Grey Mortimer*. She must not stop to look or to think. She forced him to it, gave him a wallop and closed her eyes.

She felt the slight quickening of his stride and the bold take-off, the air sang past her ears and there was a beautiful soaring moment before they landed.

Venn was looking over his shoulder.

'Magnificent!' he shouted. 'You made him spread himself for the first time.'

She had done nothing, only hit *Grey Mortimer* and closed her eyes. Now she patted him and turned back in time to see a flash of yellow and a horrible splash.

'Digory Joliffe,' grinned Venn, as she drew level. 'That will quench his fires for him. Goose-green it is, to end up with.'

'Oh, poor Mr. Joliffe and his new yellow suit! Should we go back and help him?'

'Don't be an ass,' said Trevennor. 'Where are those hounds to?'

They came over the brow of a ridge and paused. Before them the high land was piled towards Bodmin Moor, Rowtor and Brown Willy breaking the skyline and the wind coming up over with the sound of tearing silk. To the right lay the farmed land, the fertile pattern of pasture and harvest fields running down to the coast, with the cliffs drawing back to Padstow estuary, Trevose and Pentire guarding it and the sea behind. No longer to Venetia the bare bones of a country, rather a land that had come close to her heart.

'There is our beast,' said Venn, very quick and low, 'on the opposite ridge, on a level with us! Watch him!'

She saw him at last, a great hart carrying a glorious head. He stood there at gaze, looking first across the moors and then back towards the sea, pondering with a royal disdain. Then he turned up-wind and loped carelessly towards the sea.

'I wonder why he turned?' mused Venn. 'Let's cut across the coombe.'

They rode hurriedly down the steep hill, through a countryside that seemed as if it had never known hound or horn. They felt very much alone.

'You are sure he was the hunted one?' said Venetia.

'Sure as I am of mine own name. There are no two heads like that one this side the Duchy.'

And before they were half-way up the other side the others came into view, tiny hounds, toy horses and

horsemen, crawling against the clouds. Venn and Venetia quickened their pace and the horses were blowing by the time they reached the top.

Hounds had over-run the line and were casting about the place where the hart had stood.

'I saw him, sir!' called Trevennor to his father. 'He turned up-wind and went along the ridge towards the sea—about ten minutes ago.'

'Master Trevennor's sighted him!' cried Menhenitt. 'Counter, to him, boys! *Belman* has it!'

*Belman*, old and true, owned to the line and away they raced up-wind on a burning, breast-high scent. The brief check had given the horses time to recover and they rallied gamely to the amended pace. The sun beat down hotly; the wind was straight in their faces, and the dust blew back. Merryn was ahead now, Venetia saw her crimson dress and white feather, Michael's blue suit a little to the left, and Christo on a big grey riding with Menhenitt some forty yards behind the main pack.

She lost all sense of time. It seemed that they had been galloping for ever along that ridge, between the sky and the moors and the sea. But they came down at last, across Allenbridge Highway into Trevarian woods. A hunt servant who had lost them joined in again there.

'I seen him, Master Menhenitt!' he cried, 'rolling as he went and hunted sore. I think he will take to soil.'

'To what?' whispered Venetia.

'To the water,' said Venn; 'they do when they're spent.'

Menhenitt moved up close to his hounds, cheering them on—there was little fear now of crossing or doubling back. The outlaw was true as steel. The old huntsman raised his horn and blew three blasts, and then three blasts again, and then another three.

'Lord!' exclaimed Venn, 'listen to that! He has no

business to blow that call—it's the praise of a Hart Royal, due only to harts hunted by a reigning prince.'

'Perhaps it is the highest honour Menhenitt can pay him,' said Venetia.

Further on they passed Merryn, pulled up on the road with her horse sweating and heaving.

'In trouble, Merryn?'

'*Sea Wolf* is lame. I am riding home. What a day! No need to tell Michael, Venetia, or he will leave off and I don't want to spoil his hunt.'

They pushed on—there was no time to wait—through Trevarian woods, where they had chased the gipsy in the rain, and out beyond on to furze-covered slopes. *Grey Mortimer* was blown now, stumbling over the mole-hills but floundering on gallantly.

'The beast must be near done,' shouted Venn over his shoulder; 'I believe he is going to the sea.'

They viewed him again as they came out on to the cliffs, the great old hart in pride of grace—near spent now and his sins heavy upon him, but his proud head held high. There he stood, with the Atlantic shining around him, a hart royal if ever there was one in that land of brave beasts and true.

'To him, that's he!' yelled Jewell, exultant, and Menhenitt blew three blasts, and three blasts and another three, and the hounds poured on to the cliff, hot for the kill.

They saw their hart turn slowly at gaze, swing his great head and go over the edge. He went down that precipitous slope of granite and shale like a mountain goat, leaping from rock to rock. *Belman* and *Fury* went over after him and Jewell was only just in time to stop the rest. Menhenitt galloped back into the valley shouting for a boat; Jewell and Michael Erisey dismounted and





THERE HE STOOD, WITH THE ATLANTIC SHINING AROUND HIM,  
A HART ROYAL IF EVER THERE WAS ONE

clambered gingerly down the cliff to rescue the hounds. *Fury* was trapped on a little ledge of grass and shale, all the blood-lust gone out of him, but *Belman*, rolling and slithering, reached the shore somehow and went in after his quarry.

They stood there on Trevarian cliff—all that were left of them—and watched the Hart Royal swimming away into the golden west. His antlers branching out above the long, smooth Atlantic rollers, his muzzle level with the water, he went to his death with a kingly splendour.

Menhenitt put out in a boat, at length, with two fishermen from the mouth. He succeeded in rescuing *Belman* on the verge of drowning, but he could not even see the hart in that glittering waste of waters.

Venetia stared and stared westwards until her eyes ached.

'I am glad he chose that way,' she said to Trevennor; 'I could not have borne to see him brought to bay.'

'He was a great old buccaneer,' said Venn.

Michael emerged over the cliff edge from his mountaineering with Jewell. He was flushed and breathing heavily, his hair matted to his forehead. 'Have you seen Merryn?' he asked Venetia.

'She went home some time ago. *Sea Wolf* was lame.'

The huntsman coupled up the tired hounds and they went back over the hill.

'It was near enough,' said Sir John. 'You earn your new horse, Menhenitt, and young Rob Jewell here his three crowns.'

' 'Tis new wind I need,' said John Menhenitt.

'And that's small wonder, when you spend it all blowing the praise of harts royal!'

The old huntsman looked sily at his master.

'That edn' like to travel to England,' he remarked.

No, his breach of etiquette would not travel to London, which was in that distant foreign country, England.

They rode down to Pendellion. The slanting sun set a little fire alight in each pane of glass and the wind blew upon it from the sea.

'You go on in, Venetia,' said Venn; 'I'll see *Grey Mortimer* is well done by—I always have to go to the stables. He is a good horse, though he does hate the hills.'

Venetia patted *Grey Mortimer* as he was led away. Now she was dismounted, she was surprised how tired she was; her legs were stiff and felt odd without a horse between them. When she walked into the great hall she was dazzled, as once before, by that outer world of sun and wind and could see nothing of the cool interior.

'Ah, Mistress Mortimer,' said the voice of Rowland Mundy, 'I was looking for you. One of the men on the estate picked this up in the avenue near the gate. I am told it is yours.'

He held out to her in the palm of his hand something that shone—a moonstone brooch in the form of a dolphin.

Venetia took it from him with a bewildered fancy that she was waking from a dream. Rowland Mundy stood aside, smiling strangely.

'So I conclude,' said a deep, measured voice, 'that my daughter has grown careless of her belongings in my absence.'

He came forward from the window, pale, tall and splendid—Nicholas Mortimer.

It was too sudden, too overwhelming, on top of the hart's finish and the moonstone. Venetia ran to him and burst into tears. Her father held her close, looking curiously at the untidy, copper-coloured hair, the brown

hands that were all he could see of his once pampered daughter. But Venetia soon pulled herself together.

'When did you arrive?' she asked, already ashamed of her outburst.

'This afternoon,' said her father, 'two hours ago. It came very suddenly——One day they opened my prison door and let me walk out. Let me look at you, Venetia.'

She raised her face to him. His eyes were darker than she remembered them, with fine-drawn lines of strain about them; he had the look of a man who has been long sick. But the things she knew, the resolute mouth, the deep beautiful voice, the lonely magnificence, were unchanged.

'Yes,' said Nicholas slowly, 'Pendellion has made a child of you at last!' He looked over her head towards the door. 'Who is this, Venetia?'

'Michael Erisey, sir. This is my father, Mr. Erisey.'

'Give you good even, Mr. Erisey. I have heard of you.'

'And Trevennor, father.'

'Hello, sir,' said Venn. 'Are you Venetia's father? You're not very like her.'

'Wow!' yelled Perry, and rushed across the hall.

When it was over, the excitement and the greetings, and supper was done with and the children sent up to bed, Venetia sat alone in her room and carefully replaced the moonstone dolphin in its little leather case. So it had been lying in the avenue all the time, not in the depths of St. Ruan's holy well! Perhaps now Merryn's luck would change. She had looked so beautiful to-night, dressed in silver and her eyes shining like stars.

Suddenly Venetia heard something. She went to the



window and it came again. It was strange, it could not be the same, and yet she could have sworn——

It was the voice of a rutting stag down the valley, towards Joyous Gard, roaring out his challenge under the harvest moon.

## Chapter 19

### THE PASSING OF THE TORCH

VENETIA thought that when she looked back afterwards on those late summer days at Pendellion she would always think of music. They seemed to be playing and singing all the time. In the evenings they sat on the terrace until the stars were out; sometimes Michael would sing, sometimes her father, whose deep voice caught the stirring rhythm of the northern ballads until they came alive. At other times they sang in parts, Merryn and Venetia leading the women, and even Lady Treherne would join in with her meek little voice.

They rode every day. Venetia and Perry went out for long afternoons with their father up and down the coast, and Peter and Venn often came too (Venn was more subdued with Sir Nicholas than Venetia had seen him with anyone). Her father was fond of tennis and played hard games with Michael Erisey, Christo and the other gentlemen, in the court at the top of the garden, usually when they came in from riding, before supper.

The shining September days raced past. Traveller's joy turned bearded on the banks, blackberries came out, and, looking down to St. Ruan from Pendellion, the trees in the valley were russet and gold. Soon the season of gales and sea mists would set in. Nicholas Mortimer said one day to Merryn:

'It is nearly a month since I came into the west.'

Venetia looked at him, as he sat on the wall above the tennis court, waiting for Michael Erisey to come out and knock a ball about with him. He wore breeches and a

shirt open at the neck which showed his new healthy tan. Gone was the pallor of prison, and the marks of strain were going too, gradually. His grey eyes were less guarded and there was a little crease at the corners that Venetia did not remember of old, a suspicion of humour to temper the gravity.

'You have certainly changed since you came!' said Merryn.

'It must be in the air. Take Venetia for example! I sent you a well-brought-up young gentlewoman, something of a blue-stocking, and emerge to find a half-tamed little hoyden, brown as a gipsy of the woods.'

'And you prefer her brown and half-tamed,' laughed Merryn. They both looked at Venetia with speculation.

'Mrs. Fane has returned to her sister for a few months,' said Nicholas to his daughter.

'Has she, sir?' Venetia nearly asked if he had any intention of returning to London but, superstitiously, she refrained. It was better to let sleeping dogs lie. In the next instant he gave her the answer himself.

'I can't go near the Court again yet, at any rate until the spring. I don't think I regret my exile.' He lay back lazily along the wall, resting his elbow, with the sun full on him, and looked at Merryn and Venetia through slits of eyes—'I have a mind to settle down to the life of a country gentleman, to become a respected Justice of the Peace (unpaid servants of the Crown are always respectable!). I could liven my career with occasional Jesuit hunts or a privateering flutter on the Main, and spend my leisure hours designing myself a noble tomb in the new Italian style, all marble pillars and scrolls, extolling my many virtues, with Peregrine and Venetia here in a frieze below praying frantically for my soul.'

'A gruesome fancy, worthy of young Peter!' said

Merryn. 'Your future maps out more like the future of an aged man satiated with the pleasures of a lifetime than that of a man just——'

'Just what, Mistress Merryn?'

'Just turned thirty.'

'You flatter me. I am thirty-one. Otherwise how do you like my plan?'

'Well enough, except for the privateering. You and Richard Grenville would be much of a kind as quiet country justices, I am thinking. Any excuse for a nice, noisy brawl!'

'I think you mistake me, madam. It was William Bodrugan, not I, who started the affray.'

A little coldness fell on them, who had been so idle and friendly before. Merryn flushed and Venetia realized that the prickly tension that her father had brought with him from prison still lay very close to the surface.

'I was not even thinking of Bodrugan,' said Merryn.

'Here is Erisey,' said Nicholas. 'Why not think of him instead?' And he swung his legs down and cried: 'Play you, sir, for London against the west.'

'I play you for nothing I value, Sir Nicholas, at a game where I know you are my master!'

'Shame, man, you give in before we even start!'

He was like that, Nicholas Mortimer, human and friendly for hours on end and then, for some silly obscure reason, he would say something that hurt and grow remote as a stranger. It was why Venetia, for all her passionate worship, had always been a little afraid of her father.

But he was changing, day by day, and riding on those September afternoons she and Perry began to know him as they had never had a chance of knowing him before.

Merryn was often at Joyous Gard, though she did not



now seem in such a hurry to move in. She asked Venetia several times to go there with her but Venetia always thought up a convincing excuse. Though she knew it would come at the last, she wanted to put off the evil moment. It would hurt to see servants bustling around her Joyous Gard, polishing the silver flagon, spreading rugs on the floors: and the meadow in front laid with smooth cliff turf, with flower-beds under the tall windows. Julian had gone now, to marry young Pengelly in St. Elid, and Meliagraunce with his idle drinking ways and his invalid wife along with her. Lynn, Merryn's home, must be a very different house from Joyous Gard.

When the Fellowship did meet now, they met in Barbary Gutter, which was easy enough in the fine weather when the harvesting on the cliffs was over.

One noon, towards the end of dinner, a serving man came into the great hall and spoke to the yeoman, who immediately spoke to Mr. Erisey, who jumped up.

'Mr. Walter Raleigh is here, sir.'

'Henry!' bellowed Sir John, 'bring him in this instant!'

'Alas!' murmured Lady Treherne, 'the big guest chamber is all dismantled ready for the new hangings!'

In the midst of the stir Mr. Raleigh strode in, tall and composed, his finery covered by a long travelling-cloak fastened with a diamond, and with jingling spurs at his heels.

'Your pardon, Sir John, but I was passing so close along the high-road I thought I would trespass on our somewhat distant cousinship to visit you.'

'Why of course, my dear fellow! A seat next my wife for Mr. Raleigh, boy, and a bowl of water for him to wash. How long can you stay with us, sir?'

'Only one night, I fear. I am on my way north and calling on Richard Grenville at Stow to-morrow.'

'Too bad, you should stay on. Mr. Erisey, see that Mr. Raleigh's men are well bestowed! My dearest, you know Cousin Walter——'

'Yes, indeed; welcome, cousin,' said Lady Treherne. Being married to Sir John, she accepted pirates, vagabonds and Court favourites at her table without comment or surprise. 'We will give you the room in the east wing. Pray have some venison.'

'Good day to you, sir,' said Nicholas Mortimer.

'Nicholas Mortimer, by all that's marvellous! Lord, I am glad to see you so well.' Raleigh came across and greeted him; Venetia had not thought him capable of so much warmth. 'You vanished so discreetly that we had no knowledge of your existence, except for the letter you wrote me. For which I must thank you.'

'Small thanks to me, Mr. Raleigh. Since you got me my freedom.'

'You are at fault, my friend! Her Majesty and the Council set you free!'

But they both laughed. Walter Raleigh went back to his place by Lady Treherne and tackled his venison.

Venetia looked across at him and wished he had not come. That odd fear was gripping her again—she felt that his arrival was an ill omen. When she had met him in April, her father had been imprisoned. After their next meeting, in June, the *Barque Raleigh* had put back to Plymouth. There was so much that could go wrong this time—this golden September had been too good to last. She looked round the table, at her father, at Merryn, at Trevennor beside her, and wondered to whom the trouble would come now. Her wandering eye caught Mr. Raleigh's for a second and this time he gave her a little nod.

He was more silent than usual and looked tired, but he was as elegant and handsome as ever. He had a trick of

stroking his beard which she remembered, and the sun pouring in at the window set his rings flashing.

'Any news from London, Mr. Raleigh?' asked Lady Treherne.

'One item of good news—that will please you in particular, Sir Nicholas—Philip Sidney is married at last—to Frankie Walsingham, daughter of the Secretary of State.'

'Good Lord!' said Nicholas Mortimer, 'that is unexpected! Is she good enough for him?'

'She is young—no more than fourteen or fifteen—and quiet, they say. Philip has been much at Ranelagh this summer and a great likeness has grown up between them. Rumour whispers that Lady Penelope Rich has her nose put out of joint, as Stella deserted by Astrophel is not to her credit, and the Maids of Honour are all broken-hearted. The Queen is less put about than anyone; I dare say Mr. Secretary has been paving the way for some months past. I believe young Frances will make Philip Sidney a good wife.'

Venetia had a few nasty minutes of green-eyed jealousy. If Philip had to marry a chit of fourteen, why not wait another three years and marry herself! Or else choose some one older and better able to cherish him—Merryn, for instance. And it was almost indecent of him to leave Penelope Rich, his Stella, high and dry when he had written her so many superb sonnets and loved her for so long—no wonder she was put out!

But after a while Venetia realized that she could not, in all fairness, look on this as Mr. Raleigh's evil tidings. If Philip Sidney, the Court's darling, one of the leading poets and greatest gentlemen in England, her father's dear friend and her own sweetheart of long standing, humble knight and servant (those were his own words),

was happy married to Frances Walsingham, she could not wish him otherwise.—For ‘every estate loved him, where that he went’.

‘Mr. Raleigh says he wishes to walk this afternoon,’ whispered Venn at her side, round-eyed as always when he met with men of worship and renown. ‘We can all go together.’

From now on, thought Venetia, Venn would be her only knight guerdonless. She gave him such a dazzling smile that he forgot to gape at Raleigh and stared at her in bewildered surprise. He had no idea that she liked Mr. Raleigh so much!

Her father had suggested that Perry and Venetia should come with him that afternoon up the hill. He seemed to have something to say to them alone and did not look too pleased when first Trevennor, and then Mr. Walter Raleigh, joined them. But he could not refuse their company, particularly in view of the fact that if it were not for Raleigh he would still be doing his walking in the garden of the governor’s house in the Marshalsea!

They all went up the hill behind the house, *Just* and Sir Nicholas’ own spaniel *Gay* running ahead. At the summit they had the view inland to the moors and down the coast. There was a brooding stillness over the land and a queer glare westward, a pale unholy light that lay against the round horizon. They turned along the ridge towards Barbary, walking between the brittle stalks of the stubble, and Venetia could not shake off the absurd feeling of uneasiness.

They came to a high bank, facing towards the sea. Nicholas sat down on it, and the children beside him.

‘It looks like storm,’ said Raleigh.

‘What has gone wrong?’ asked Nicholas Mortimer.

Walter Raleigh sat down, too, on the bank, moving



slowly like a tired man and staring into that strange horizon.

'It's my brother Humphrey,' he said. 'His voyage has failed.'

Nobody stirred. Only the dogs bounded about in the stubble, sniffing for conies, and the tide sighed very softly down under.

'Is Sir Humphrey well?'

'He was lost on the 9th of this month in the frigate *Squirrel*, somewhere north of the Azores.'

No, oh no! It could not be true! Venetia thought of General Gilbert standing on the deck of the *Delight* when they said good-bye, his hand on his wife's shoulder, smiling among his ship's company. A brave and charming gentleman who knew well how to make merry with his friends.

His half-brother was speaking again:

'I had it all direct from Edward Hayes, captain of the *Golden Hind*. 'He brought her into Falmouth last Sunday, the 22nd—alone.'

'But there were five ships in the fleet!' said Nicholas.

'Four,' retorted Raleigh bitterly. 'Mine. the *Barque Raleigh*, you may remember, turned about after two days. This is the story, as Hayes told it me.

'They sailed from Cawson the 11th day of June, and after surmounting contrary winds and thick weather, the fleet at last foregathered at the harbour of St. John, in the Newfoundland. This country was first discovered by Cabot the Venetian, in a ship of Bristol, eighty years ago. Humphrey found merchants of several nations there, fishing and trading. He went ashore and planted the arms of England, and there and then took possession of the harbour of St. John and land adjoining, as territory of Queen Elizabeth, and under her dominion for himself, his heirs and assigns for ever.

‘He ordered the *Swallow* from thence to England, with men that had fallen sick on the voyage, and Captain Winter and his company took her home, while Captain Maurice Browne and the *Swallow*’s men were transferred to the *Delight*. They had plundered a fishing vessel on the way out and Humphrey was still sore with them. He himself moved into the *Squirrel*, the frigate.

‘The three ships, *Delight*, *Golden Hind* and *Squirrel*, sailed from Newfoundland about the 20th of August, cleared Cape Race by night, and ran into foul winds again, but made Cape Breton safely. So they trended down the American coast, landing men between Trepassa and Placentia bays, who brought back a report of a temperate climate and a fair country.

‘The night of August 28th, Captain Hayes recounts, they made merry on board the *Delight*. The other ships could hear quite clearly the trumpets, drums and fifes playing. It was a quiet evening but great herds of porpoises brought promise of storm, and in the frigate there were frivolous reports of strange voices by night, such as often come to trouble men keeping lonely watch at the helm.

‘The day following the wind rose, with rain and mist. In the thick weather the master of the *Hind* let out a cry of “Land!” but whether it was white cliffs he had seen, or only the breaking surf, no one could discover. On sounding, they found they were among shoals and sands and the order was given to cast about, but even as she turned the *Delight* ran aground.

‘The *Hind* and the *Squirrel* cast about into the wind’s eye, the sea going mightily and high, and at last recovered sea-room, but they were powerless to help the Admiral. They watched her beating to pieces before their eyes, but could not even see what became of the men, though they stood by all that day and the night following. A few may

have escaped in the ship's pinnace, but the rest must have drowned—the Hungarian writer Budas, the gold refiner from Saxony, close on a hundred mariners, and Maurice Browne, the captain, who mounted on the highest deck to meet his end sooner than forsake his charge. With them went my brother's books and all notes of the voyage, besides the greater part of the provisions.

'The story after that was one of beating up and down that coast in thick and blustering weather, daily colder, with winter drawing on and food supplies running low. Humphrey was persuaded by the distress around him to alter course for home. The wind was large for England but very high and the *Squirrel* laboured heavily. Humphrey came twice aboard the *Golden Hind*, once to have his foot dressed by the surgeon, having trodden upon a nail, and once to make merry all day with the captain, master and ship's company. He spoke much to them all of a new voyage he was planning, promising to set them forth royally in the spring with two fleets, one for the south and one for the north. He himself would go north, saying he was become a northern man altogether. He was confident of finding the money for it. "Leave that to me," he said, "I will ask a penny of no man. I will bring good tidings unto her Majesty, who will be so gracious to lend me ten thousand pounds."—Of all delusions, surely the most improbable! So like Humphrey, poor dear fool, where money was concerned! and ever confident.

'Captain Hayes tried to persuade him to stay aboard the *Hind*. *Squirrel* was a frigate of only ten tons burthen, ill equipped for those mountainous northern seas. But he would not forsake his little company when homeward bound, with whom he had passed so many storms and perils. There was another reason too. He had heard it said that he was afraid of the sea.'

‘That evil old report of no good hap at sea, in a more slanderous form—’ murmured Nicholas. ‘Humphrey Gilbert never knew the meaning of fear.’

‘If he did, he conquered it. Off the Azores they ran into yet more foul weather and terrible outrageous seas, breaking short and pyramid-wise. On the afternoon of the 9th September the frigate was nearly cast away, but that time she recovered and gave signs of joy. They in the *Hind*, so oft as they came within hearing, saw Humphrey sitting abaft with a book in his hand repeating aloud: “We are as near to Heaven by sea as by land.”

‘That same Monday night, about midnight or after, the frigate being ahead, suddenly her lights went out and the watch in the *Golden Hind* cried, “The General is cast away!” In that moment, they said, the frigate was devoured and swallowed up of the sea.

‘They looked for her all that night and all the days following, omitting no small sail at sea, but vainly, for the *Golden Hind* came into Falmouth alone.’

Raleigh’s voice shook suddenly on the last word. That strange unholy radiance shone on him from the west, turning his face to a mask in which the blue eyes burned, deep as the ocean itself. Venetia no longer doubted him. This was his battle; the memory of those boyhood dreams, shared into a manhood of endeavour, was something he must bear alone.

‘It was the enterprise that counted,’ said Nicholas Mortimer at last, ‘far and above its success or its failure. The Newfoundland will remember him. for the rest, you can do what he planned to do.’

‘I will—by the living God, I swear it! I will build great new ships. I will renew the charter with wider powers and set forth a fleet royally in the spring, and I will not rest



until Wingandacoa and all that northern coast of America is territory planted in the Queen's name.'

'Grenville is with you for that voyage,' cried Trevennor, seeing himself already on the high seas.

Raleigh looked at him briefly:

'I know it. I visit him to-morrow at Stowe.'

'I, too, am with you,' said Nicholas, 'with all the money at my disposal, to help you fit out a fleet, and with my services if need be.'

It was born, that grand new resolve, from the void of personal loss and disaster, as they sat on a bank above Pendellion; and suddenly the sinister cloud passed over and the sun shone out in a west dazzling with promise. But Venetia thought of the sunlight that had come dancing over the Sound from Gara Point one morning in June, and that Gilbert, and the *Delight*, and the little *Squirrel*, had never come to the haven where they would be.

Nicholas Mortimer walked again with his children on the cliffs, after supper that evening. Walter Raleigh had gone to his room. He was leaving in the morning for Sir Richard Grenville's house of Stowe, and thence back to London. Venn was cony-catching with Christo in the warren—twilight was just the time for it—and Merryn was still at Lynn, called Joyous Gard, where she had been all the afternoon.

Venetia and Perry walked on either side of their father in the sunset, very solemn after Mr. Raleigh's story.

'You have been happy here at Pendellion, have you not?' Nicholas asked suddenly.

'Yes indeed,' they chorused. Venetia closed her eyes. Now it was coming, it was coming—Gilbert's tragic voyage had not been the end of the trouble Walter Raleigh had brought in his train. In another moment she would

know that they were to leave Pendellion, that the whole glorious summer was almost a thing of the past.

The word did not come. She glanced at her father. He turned to them both, his face lit up by the sunset.

'I am going to be married again,' he said slowly, 'to Merryn Treherne.'

Clear, still, remote, a scene in a crystal, Venetia saw the cliffs and the sea around her, and the setting sun, and her father's face.

'*What!*' said Perry.

'I am taking Merryn to wife and we are going to live at Lynn.'

He waited, for the first time in his life, for the verdict of his children.

Merryn—so different these last few weeks, her eyes shining like stars, singing so gaily with Nicholas of an evening; Joyous Gard—to be their own home; Trevennor—a near neighbour always: her father—Venetia stared into his eyes and realized that she had always known him lonely and that he was lonely no longer.

It was idiotic but, as at all moments of crisis, she wanted to cry.

'Oh! What a marvellous thing!' cried Perry.

'Venetia?' said her father very low.

'The best thing in the world,' said Venetia.

And as she said it the sun went down into the Atlantic in a blaze of triumphal splendour.

## Chapter 20

### JOYOUS GARD

ON the last day of September Sir Nicholas Mortimer married Merryn Treherne. It was wise to settle the matter before the Queen got wind of it in London. She did not care much for weddings, particularly among the gentlemen of her Court, and though she had borne up graciously to Ned Denny's betrothal to Margaret Edgcumbe, and her beloved Philip Sidney's to Frances Walsingham, Nicholas thought that he, a banished man still under the royal displeasure, would be well advised to celebrate his wedding feast swiftly and without too much noise.

They were married quietly in St. Ruan church, with only the family, the household and the close neighbours present. The simple interior was decked with 'the white rose and the red' and some one had had the happy, if pagan, idea of tying sheaves of corn to the ends of each pew. Venetia, standing beside Perry at the front, found it hard to believe that this was really happening—that her father who had once loved a girl called Christina in the glittering city of Venice, and Merryn, whose Peter had sailed away from Dartmouth, waving from the quarter-deck in a suit of cramasie velvet, were both standing at the altar being made husband and wife. Her father's deep voice, Merryn's clear answers, Master Specott repeating the ritual of the marriage service, the swelling music and the singing—it was all like a dream. But when they turned down the aisle together, between the ripe wheat, and the magnificent peal of bells clashed out above the bridal music, Venetia had never seen her father so handsome and

so smiling, nor Merryn so radiantly beautiful. They went out into the sunlight with a glory on their faces.

They kept open house that evening at Lynn. Venetia, dressing in her room at Pendellion, heard the coming and going of horses in the yard below as more and more of the neighbours arrived. Pendellion was crowded to overflowing—Perry and Henry were sharing a room with Christo and Venn, and the little drawing-room next-door to Venetia's room had been set aside for Mistress Bassett, who had given up her room to the whole Tremayne family. Mistress Chamond was in with Venetia. They both dressed hurriedly as they were going back to Lynn to help Merryn prepare for the evening.

Venetia wore her sea-water-green dress with the seed-pearls, the one she had worn on her birthday at Mortimer House. Patience had had to let it down all round since then. Her hair was brushed out, copper-coloured and shining under the little pearl cap, and she looked once more the proud lady.

'I saw Rob Jewell with you at the church,' said Venetia to Patience. 'When is your wedding fixed?'

'A week to-day, Mistress Venetia. You know that Sir Nicholas has offered us lodging at Lynn, so that Rob can go daily to the kennels until he takes over from Master Menhenitt, and I can continue to wait upon you?'

'Patience, I am glad! Everything is turning out too good to be true!' She danced a measure up and down the room. 'Are you ready, Chammy?'

'Very near,' said Mistress Chamond. 'Just fastening my brooch.'

'My brooch, too, Patience!—the moonstone.'

She pinned it across her bodice, Philip Sidney's moonstone dolphin. It smiled at her knowingly with its ruby



eyes. 'You see,' said the dolphin, 'I brought your Merryn good luck after all!'

Two strange figures appeared at the door, wrapped in bundly cloaks, one gaunt and thin, one round and fat.

'Here we be,' said Nurse. 'Joanna's coming too.'

'But we're off to Joy—to Lynn, Nurse.'

'And we. D'ye think I'd let Sir Nicholas take to himself a wife without being there to wait on her on her bridal night?'

'Nor me neither,' said Joanna stoutly and with an odd want of tact. 'Master Peter's lady is my charge.'

'Oh dear—very well.'

So they all rode down through the woods to Lynn, Venetia on *Grey Mortimer* and Mistress Chamond on her nag, and Nurse and Joanna pillion behind two serving-men. The wind was blowing on the hill, with a high light sky, but it was dusk already under the trees and there was a sweet rotting smell of autumn.

'There will be frost to-night,' said Joanna.

They came out into the meadow, to the view of Joyous Gard that Venetia loved well. The tower with its oriel window stood out darkly, the outline of the chimneys massed behind it. This was her enchanted castle, but no longer a castle that slept. The light of many candles streamed out from the tall windows across the grass and already strains of music travelled to their ears. Another phrase of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* came into Venetia's mind—'*Sir Ector heard noise and light in the quire of Joyous Gard.*' It was to Joyous Gard that Sir Launcelot had carried his Guinevere when he saved her from burning, in that last passionate interlude before he returned her to King Arthur, before he went seaward and the Fellowship of the Round Table was broken for ever.

Venetia thought—'this is my Joyous Gard now, mine as well as Merryn's. I am coming home!'

They rode round to the front door which was thrown wide to her by the yeoman. She followed him into the hall she had never seen, and up the wide staircase to Merryn's room. Merryn was at the mirror, the candlelight paying homage to her beauty. The gold coverlet she had been working the night of the beacon shimmered on the great bed, and there were roses on the table. The room had a faint aromatic smell—it might be bay leaves.

'What a galaxy of gentlewomen!' cried Merryn gaily, and indeed the big room seemed quite full. While Mistress Chamond and Venetia helped her finish dressing, Nurse and Joanna proceeded to create havoc among her possessions, taking them out of the chest and putting them in the locker and wrangling with each other in the background. It was the most natural thing in the world for Nicholas to come wandering in and exclaim:

'Merciful heavens, what a crowd of women! Venetia, will you fasten this ruff? My man has fingers like hams.'

And for Merryn to say:

'Shall I wear the pearl ear-rings, Nicholas, or the diamonds?'

And for him to reply, smiling at her in the mirror:

'Diamonds, dear heart, which are called the Stones of Love. To-night I want you to sparkle like the morning.'

The banquet was laid in a long room in the front of the house. Merryn came down the stairs on her husband's arm, in a dress of midnight blue and silver, with diamonds at her ears and a diamond necklace like white fire against her throat. Nicholas was splendid in wine-coloured velvet, hung about the shoulders with a heavy gold chain.

It was a merry supper. Looking down the tables from

her seat beside Venn, Venetia saw that they were all there—Perry, Sir John and Lady Treherne, Christo, Thomasine and Peter; Michael Erisey, Rowland Mundy, Master Ferrars and Sosthenes Brent; Master Specott the Vicar, Mistress Chamond and Mistress Bassett (as always staring). And Mr. Roscarrock and the Tremaynes, and Digory Joliffe himself, dressed in gold as if he were the bridegroom. They talked and laughed and ate and drank, and there was a great scraping of benches when they stood up to drink, in royal burgundy, the toast to 'The Bride and Bridegroom'.

The bridegroom rose to return thanks:

'I stand before you in all humility,' he said in his deep, grave voice, 'knowing it is gross impertinence in a Welshman, London born, to come and live among you gentlemen of Cornwall. The laws that go on the marches are unknown down here, Celts though we both be. Let my wife be my excuse, who was both Killigrew and Treherne, and her beauty plead for me, poor fool of a foreigner, whose heart is no longer his own.'

That pleased the neighbours, and if applause was anything to go by, Nicholas Mortimer received a warm welcome in his new country.

Trevennor turned to Venetia and raised his glass.

'A toast for us,' he said: 'To Joyous Gard.'

As she drank Venetia's glance wandered to the sideboard and there she saw the silver flagon, polished and shining, holding the secret of the Fellowship.

There were songs before they left the table, some gay and others somewhat bawdy. Lastly Michael Erisey was called for. He came forward amid the clatter and laughter and set down his lute opposite Merryn. He sang a lyric by Thomas Wyatt, that most lovable and unfortunate of men, and the measure was slow and a trifle sad.

‘Forget not yet the tried intent  
Of such a truth as I have meant;  
My great travail so gladly spent,  
Forget not yet!

Forget not yet, forget not this—  
How long ago hath been, and is,  
The mind that never meant amiss,  
Forget not this!

Forget not then thine own approved,  
The which so long hath thee so loved,  
Whose steadfast faith yet never moved;  
Forget not this!’

There was a little silence. Venetia saw Merryn say something to Michael and he looked at her, smiled and turned away.

‘What a doleful note to close on!’ boomed Sir John. ‘Who said dancing! Lead the way, Nicholas my boy. Where’s young Mortimer? Take my Trevennor, young Mortimer, and make him dance and not sprawl about like a long-limbed colt.’

So Venetia and Trevennor followed Nicholas and Merryn into the great chamber, where the dancing was.

It was their room. A radiance of candles lit it from floor to ceiling and there was already a warm smell of tallow. There were flowers arranged along the walls, stocks, snapdragons and michaelmas daisies, and the tall windows were open. But a fire blazed in the fireplace and the red light slashed across the crest of the winged stag and the motto ‘LOYALTY’. An orchestra was playing. It was curious that, for all the ‘noise and light in the quire of Joyous Gard’, Venetia could still feel the atmosphere of the house around her, quiet, watchful and serene.

‘It has not changed,’ she said to Venn in wonder.



'Don't you think so?'

'Not underneath. It's still Joyous Gard.'

'Of course it is. Shall we dance the solemn pavañe?'

'Not unless you ask me properly.'

Trevennor grinned and swept her a tremendous bow, brushing the floor with his hat plume. Venetia took his hand and they moved out into the dignified measure, wheeling, turning, the girl's farthingales swaying in time to the music. Her father was dancing with Merryn and they moved with such superb grace that Venetia could hardly take her eyes from them.

Venn danced well for his age, but it took all his concentration, and he wore an absorbed frown as he listened for the beat. At the last bar, as Venetia rose from her curtsy, he said appreciatively:

'You are rarely light in hand. Thomasine's a load of bricks compared to you.'

'You speak of me as if I were *Roister*!'

They went to the window, their window that used to be unfastened, and leaned out, shoulder to shoulder. The grass outside was frosty under the stars.

'Do you remember Julian, climbing in on us, Venn, Lammas-eve?'

'Could I ever forget it! You know Merryn said a strange thing to me to-day. She was standing with your father after the wedding service and we were talking about this evening, and she said: 'I look to you, Venn, to be on your best behaviour, not masking yourself as a spirit to bring my poor Lynn into bad repute.' Did you tell her about it, in a weak moment?'

'Never!'

'I thought not.'

'She couldn't have guessed, Venn! What did father say?'

'Nothing. He just looked at me mighty hard, the way he does, and when I was going away they both laughed.'

'Chance, I suppose. How odd!'

'I like weddings,' said Venn after a pause, 'though father says burials are better for meeting friends. Let's get out of the window. Nobody's looking.'

'Oh Venn, my best dress!'

'Foh! Have you turned lady again, with your London clothes?'

That stung her and she vaulted after him over the sill on to the grass. It was cold outside. They wandered across the newly turfed lawn which scrunched under-foot, and Venetia could feel the frost through her dancing slippers.

'I wonder if Raleigh has gotten further with his voyage,' said Venn, 'and if he will ask Grenville to command it? I heard him say that when he sets up the plantation in Wingandacoa he will call it Virginia—after the Virgin Queen.'

'Rather a nice name. Do you know when you will go to Stowe, Venn?'

'At the end of October, I believe, or early November.'

'I shall miss you.'

'And I you. But it is best to do one's seafaring when one is young before one marries—all men say that.'

Venetia thought of Philip Sidney's song that she had sung in London:

Time will all these thoughts remove,  
Time doth work what no man knoweth.

Time had worked marvellous things for her within these six months. What did it hold for the future, for her and for Venn? She looked at him, his face dark against the lighted windows—unruly hair, stubborn chin, long black lashes like a girl's.

'You are going to marry me, you know,' he said carelessly.

'I didn't.'

'I meant to all along. From the time you made such a hopeless display sliding down the cliff to Barbary Gutter.'

It was a strange way of telling her! Tristram had told Isold: 'I promise you faithfully that I shall be all the days of my life your knight.'

Venetia said:

'You argue a lot. You will be worse when you grow older.'

'You wait till Richard Grenville has done with me. You'll be delighted with me then!'

But she liked him as he was, her sharp-witted, black-eyed, swarthy little Cornishman.

A lilting measure came to them across the grass.

'The King of Denmark's galliard,' said Venn. 'We must go in. I have to dance with the buxom Tremayne.'

'And I with Christo.'

They went back into the light and the warmth and music.

Venetia danced with Christo and with Perry, and then described a dignified pavane with Rowland Mundy. After that, by way of contrast, she partnered Michael Erisey in a very merry country dance and he, with a wild look in his eye, twirled her round so fast that she could scarcely breathe. In the same frolic Digory Joliffe, in excess of zeal, tripped over his own heels and slid across the floor into the orchestra, putting his foot through the drum. He took this in very good part and continued to hop to the music with the drum on his foot.—The drummer's face was a study!

'Faster, let yourself go!' cried Michael, and swung Venetia round and round until the halo of the candlelight

and the glowing colour and movement were all one giddy whirl. He landed her up against the wall, dizzy and gasping, clinging to his arm as the one stable thing in a rocking universe.

'If we go round once more, Michael, I shall be sick.'

'Heaven forbid! Tell me, Venetia, shall I wait till next year and then offer for the hand of Mistress Thomasine?'

She gaped at him, not knowing if he were laughing or serious.

'Are you mad? She annoys you beyond measure!'

'She is really rather touching. And very rich.'

*'Michael!'*

'Well, well, perhaps you are right.' His eyes gleamed, teasing her. 'Here is your daughter, Sir Nicholas. I have shocked her to the marrow and twirled her until she feels sick.'

'I should have thought it difficult to do either! She looks somewhat green. Will you dance or come outside Venetia?'

'I think outside, father. It is so warm and thick here.'

He led her out again into the frosty starlight, where only the shallow murmur of the river broke across the silence. They walked round the house to the octagonal tower that looked towards Pendellion and the coast.

'When you and Perry come here to live, Venetia, would you like this turret room as your own?'

The turret room with the high oriel window—it had always been her dream to live there!

'Oh, I would, father. Please.'

'Yesterday evening,' said her father, his shoulders against the tower, his arm through hers, 'I saw the first of the geese flying south. Do you remember on the Thames marshes watching that lone flier going north in the spring?'

'Yes. You envied him his freedom.'



'Now they come south again, from the northern breeding grounds. Perhaps from Newfoundland, which Gilbert took for the Queen, or the North-Western passage which he never lived to find.'

So much sorrow, thought Venetia, alongside so much joy and splendour. People going their own ways, absorbed in their own affairs, and yet somehow all fitting into a pattern, like a piece of music. Life.

A cold breath of wind crept up the valley from the sea. Nicholas Mortimer moved.

'The music has started,' he said.

It was the tune of *Greensleeves*. By the door they met Trevennor.

'This is the last dance, sir. Merryn is waiting for you within. Come on, red-head.'

He took Venetia's hand and they went in together to the noise and light in the quire of Joyous Gard.

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